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CONTENTS



SHORT STORIES

DECEPTIONS by Edward D. Hoch 6
A REASONABLE PIECE OF WRONGDOING by Stringfellow Forbes 24
GAME PLAN by Stephen Wasylyk 30
THE SECRET OF WINTHROP WADE by David Braly 43
THE MAN FROM THE MISTED LAKE by Ron Butler 80
THE HOBBY FAIR MYSTERY by Ingram Meyer 123
THE ANGRY COURIER by Jeffry Scott 139

MYSTERY CLASSIC

THE FOUR SEASONS by Michael Innes 146

DEPARTMENTS

EDITOR'S NOTES 5
OFF THE RECORD: Plus Expenses: The Private Eye as Great American Hero by Loren D. Estleman 64
BOOKED & PRINTED by Mary Cannon 74
THE MYSTERIOUS PHOTOGRAPH 79
MURDER BY DIRECTION by Peter Shaw 116
FRAMES OF REFERENCE by Peter Christian 119
UNSOLVED by George J. Summers 122
SOLUTION TO THE AUGUST "UNSOLVED" 153
THE STORY THAT WON 154

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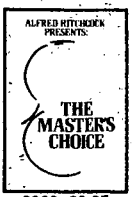
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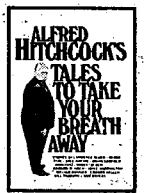
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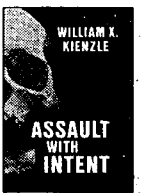
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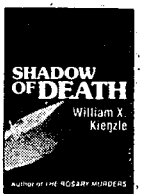
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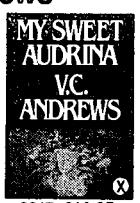
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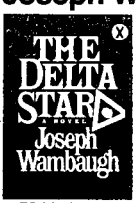
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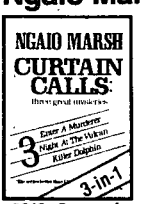
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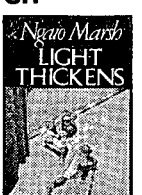
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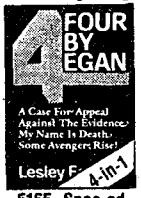
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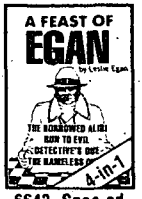
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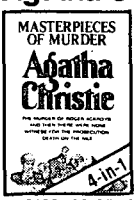


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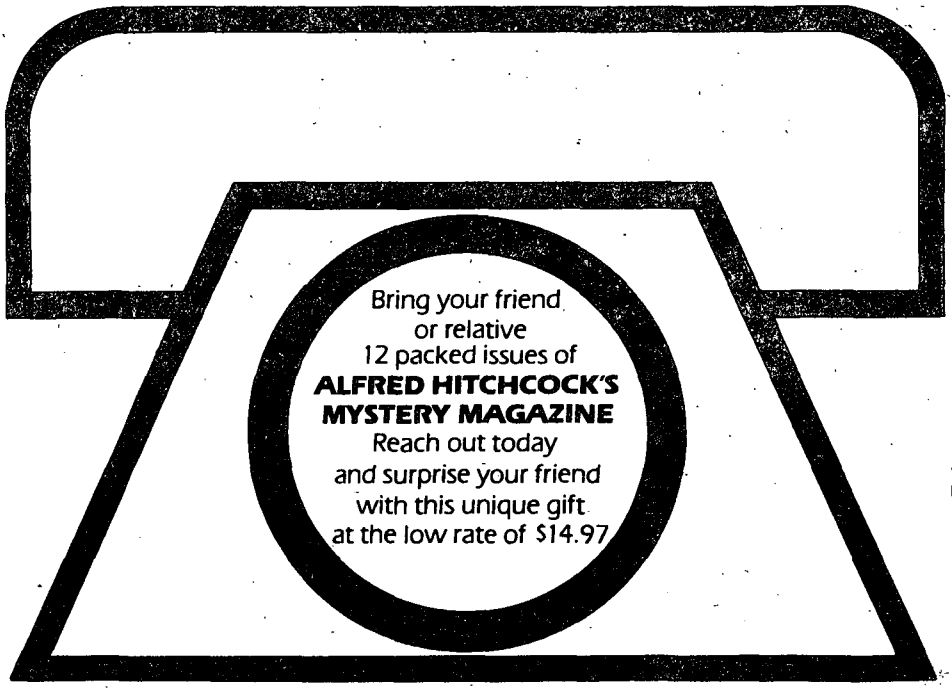
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EDITOR'S NOTES

by Cathleen Jordan

In the June issue of AHMM, we published the list of nominees in each of ten categories for the Edgar Allan Poe Awards (or "Edgars," as they're usually called), presented each year by the Mystery Writers of America at their annual banquet. And we promised to bring you the winners, as well.

At this writing, therefore, we can say that dozens of mystery writers *have* met in New York, that the awards dinner has taken place, and that the Edgars and Scrolls (for the runners-up) have been handed out. Herewith, then, the list:

BEST NOVEL OF 1982: *Billingsgate Shoal* by Rick Boyer (Houghton Mifflin).

BEST FIRST NOVEL OF 1982: *The Butcher's Boy* by Thomas Perry (Scribner's).

BEST ORIGINAL PAPERBACK OF 1982: *Triangle* by Teri White (Ace/Charter).

BEST SHORT STORY OF 1982: "There Are No Snakes in Ireland" by Frederick Forsyth, from *No Comebacks* (Viking).

BEST FACT CRIME OF 1982: *The Vatican Connection* by Richard Hammer (Holt, Rinehart and Winston).

BEST BIOGRAPHICAL/CRITICAL STUDY OF 1982: *Cain* by Roy Hoopes (Holt, Rinehart and Winston).

BEST JUVENILE OF 1982: *The Murder of Hound Dog Bates* by Robbie Branscum (Viking).

BEST MOTION PICTURE SCREENPLAY OF 1982: *The Long Good Friday,* original screenplay by Barrie Keeffe (Handmade Films).

BEST TELEVISION FEATURE OF 1982: *Rehearsal for Murder,* written by Richard Levinson and William Link (CBS).

BEST EPISODE IN A TELEVISION SERIES OF 1982: "In the Steele of the Night," written by Joel Steiger for *Remington Steele* (NBC).

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Deceptions

by Edward D. Hoch



In those days I was young. We were all young, in one way or another. Martie was the youngest, in terms of years. It was the summer after her graduation from high school, and she'd just turned eighteen a few months earlier. She was a sleek, modern girl with windswept hair and a way of always saying what she thought. Martie Shane was her full name, and her father was a law professor at the university.

I'd graduated from high school a year ahead of Martie, and during those days I'd known her only as one of the cheerleaders for the football team. I wasn't on the team myself, being more interested in my studies than in sports, but I attended the games like everyone else. Martie Shane wasn't the best-

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looking girl on the squad, but she had good legs and a certain take-charge quality that I found attractive. I was friendly with Hank Webster who was on the team, and I knew he was dating her.

"What's she like?" I asked him once after a game, when we'd cut out from the rest of the crowd to have a couple of beers at a neighborhood bar that never asked for proof of age. "I've never really talked to her."

"I like her," he admitted. "She's a wild kid. We do great things together."

"Her father teaches at the university, doesn't he?"

"Yeah. He doesn't much like me. I try to stay out of his way." Hank was big and broad-shouldered, and the idea of his staying out of anyone's way made me chuckle. He was a nice guy and a good friend, but just the opposite of me in most ways. Football and all that went with it were his whole life. I never saw him look at a book except in the day or two before the finals when I helped him cram for exams.

"You get very far with Martie?" I asked.

"Ah, you know," he answered vaguely. "She's not like other girls. I wouldn't try to go all the way."

"Hell you wouldn't!"

"No, I mean it! She's got class, Rich."

So we talked about her on occasion, and I saw him with her a couple of times, but that was as far as it went. Hank and I graduated from high school. I went off to a college in Boston, and he stayed home. He'd never pretended to be college material, though I knew he secretly hoped for a football scholarship. He wasn't quite good enough to impress the recruiters, and that summer after high school he talked of working in his dad's garage until something better came along. I wondered if it ever would, for someone like Hank Webster.

I didn't see him when I came home for Christmas, though we talked on the phone. Somehow he seemed distant, not entirely comfortable with the sound of my voice. In a few short months we'd become something like strangers. I didn't even ask him about Martie Shane because, I suppose, I must have imagined their relationship had cooled since his graduation.

So it wasn't till the end of my freshman year in May that I came home from college and saw Hank again. I sought him out one sunny afternoon at his dad's garage, where my mother had told me he was still working. "When he works at all," she said rather pointedly. She'd never considered him someone I should spend much time with.

Webster's Garage was more

Illustration by Nick Cuti

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of a junkyard than I'd remembered it, with a field of wrecked cars gradually spreading over the landscape like a plague. I pulled my own car into the parking space out front and walked up to the little cinder-block building that served as the office. Hank was there talking to someone on the phone about a part for a 1962 Pontiac.

He didn't look up until he'd finished, and then a slow smile spread across his face. "Well, hell—how's it goin', Rich?"

"Pretty good, Hank." We shook hands, and I tried not to notice his seedy appearance. People didn't get dressed up to work in a garage, of course, but it was more than just his clothes. His whole expression seemed to have hardened in the eight months since I'd seen him last.

"How's college, huh? I'll bet you're makin' out with the girls."

"A little," I admitted. "What about you? Married yet?" It was a kidding remark, because I knew he wasn't.

"Got no money to get married," he replied, strolling out through a side door to inspect a wreck that seemed to be a recent arrival.

"Going with Martie still, or have you got someone new?"

"No, it's still Martie. She's graduating next month." His voice seemed to warm a bit as he spoke of her.

"That's great. Maybe I'll call up somebody and we can all go out together."

"Sure, if you want. I don't have much cash, but I could swing a few beers. Martie'd like it."

"I'll give you a call." We talked about a few other old friends, and then I left him. He hadn't watched me go. He was different, somehow, or else I was.

A few nights later I did call him, and we set up a date for the following Friday, planning to meet at the old neighborhood bar we'd frequented in high school. I'd phoned a girl I'd dated a few times before I went off to college, and she was agreeable to seeing me again. Her name was Amy and she'd graduated with Hank and me. But when we arrived at the bar, I was sorry at once that I'd brought her.

Hank and Martie were already there, seated in our old booth with beers in front of them. As soon as I saw her, without a word's being said, I knew that she and Hank were sleeping together. There was something about their intimacy that was both obvious and intimidating to others. I didn't mind it myself, but I was embarrassed for Amy.

"You look good, Rich," Martie said as we sat down, bringing her hand into view from beneath the table. "College must

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agree with you." It was the most she'd ever said to me at one time.

"I'm enjoying it," I admitted, "but it took me a few months to get adjusted. You going away to school?"

"I don't want to, but my folks are firm about it. I've been accepted at State."

"You'll be close to me. Sometimes we invite the State girls over for mixers." But I could see Hank was already bored with the conversation. Enough talk of college, I decided. "Tell us about the old school, Martie. What are we missing?"

"Not a thing," she assured us all. "Kay Swenson got pregnant and had to drop out. That's the biggest news. Oh, and Mr. Isaacs divorced his wife."

"Old Isaacs? Think he's making it with one of his math students?" The idea sent us into gales of laughter.

"Probably with Swenson!" Hank said, and we laughed some more. It was almost like the old days.

I took a job for the summer, on the maintenance crew of a downtown office building. By coincidence, it was the building where Foster Shane's law firm had its offices. Martie had gone to work at her uncle's firm, helping out with secretarial and research chores during the summer vacation period. She was anxious to earn spending money for college, and working for her uncle was an easy enough way to do it.

I'd run into her occasionally in the building during those first weeks, but that was about all I saw of her or Hank. For some reason he'd taken coolly to my efforts to keep our friendship alive, and we hadn't been out together since that single night in May. I was coming back from my lunch break a few days after the July Fourth weekend when I spotted Martie entering the building just ahead of me. I caught up with her and she seemed pleased enough to see me.

"How's Hank these days?" I asked.

"Fine. Keeping busy at the garage."

I noticed a fancy wristwatch she was wearing. "That's nice. Is it new?"

She nodded. "A gift from Hank. He's been showering me with gifts lately. Wants me to forget about college and stay here."

"You going to?"

She snorted a reply. "My dad would kill me if I didn't go to school."

"What does he think about Hank?"

"He says I should go out with other boys, that I'm too young to go steady. All that sort of crap."

We entered the crowded ele-

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vator, and the conversation ceased abruptly. She left at her floor with a brief goodbye.

During the week that followed, I thought about the shower of gifts and wondered where Hank Webster was getting the money for them. Maybe his father's garage business was more profitable than it had seemed. But when I called him at the garage one day, Mr. Webster answered. "Hank don't work here no more," he informed me. "There wasn't enough for him to do."

Two days later, when I saw Martie in the lobby of the building, I asked her about it. "Oh, he quit. I think he had a fight with his dad."

"What's he doing now?"

She shrugged. "He says he's got a couple of possibilities."

It was only by chance that my eyes were attracted to a small item in the following week's paper. I wouldn't ordinarily be interested in something as commonplace as a wave of house burglaries, but the news report stated the police might at last have a lead. At the scene of the latest burglary they'd found a tire iron that had been used to force a rear door. Of course anyone might own a tire iron, but it made me think of Hank.

I looked back through the papers for the previous week and found more mentions of the string of burglaries. There'd been a score or more in all, over the past few months, always in the better areas of town. The police suspected the same person was responsible, but they had no proof other than the fact that he usually entered through a rear door. I figured our city was big enough to support two burglars—or even two dozen. And there was no real reason for supposing one of them might be Hank Webster.

Still, that night I drove over to the apartment he'd taken on the east side. I'd never been there, of course, but he'd told me about it. I was surprised to see that it was in a nice middle-class neighborhood, and I wondered once more where he was getting the money.

He answered my ring at once, looking annoyed for only an instant. Then he welcomed me inside. "What brings you to this end of town, Rich?"

"I was driving by, and there was something I wanted to ask you. It seemed handier than phoning you later." I looked around at the apartment's furnishings. "You've got a nice place here."

"I've tried to fix it up. I want Martie to move in with me."

"You mean get married?"

He shrugged.

"Either way. Whatever she wants."

"What she wants is to go on to college, isn't it?"

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"That's what her old man wants!"

I glanced over at the expensive TV and the hi fi, thinking again about where the money might be coming from. I'd seen what I'd come to see, but I was ready with an excuse for the visit. As it happened, it wasn't entirely a false excuse. "I wanted to ask you about her father, actually. That's why I stopped by. He's a law professor and her uncle's with that fancy law firm. I've been thinking about going to law school, but I need some advice. It's not the sort of thing my folks can advise me on. They don't know anything about lawyers. I was wondering if I could ask Martie to talk to her dad or her uncle."

"Sure, why not? You don't have to ask my permission. You'd do better not mentioning me to her old man, though."

"Thanks, Hank."

"That's all you stopped for?"

"Sure. And to see you. We haven't seen much of each other this summer."

"Martie says she sees you sometimes at work. How's the job?"

"I'm earning a few bucks. That's all I can say for it. You're not at the garage any more, huh?"

He shook his head and reached for a cigarette. "You can't work for your old man. It's no good."

"You doing anything?"

He stared at me through the cigarette smoke. "I'm getting by."

I stood up to go. "Okay, I'll ask Martie about talking to her dad."

"You're really thinking about law school?"

"Sure. You have to do something with your life, and I don't know any poor lawyers."

"Good luck, Rich," he said at the door.

"I'm not going back to school for two months! Don't make it sound so final."

But it was final in a way. The next time I saw Hank Webster, his life had changed irrevocably.

Two days later I spoke to Martie about seeing her father. I had the impression at once that Hank had prepared her, though she didn't admit it. "Sure, Rich," she said simply. "Dad would love to talk with you. He'd be much better than Uncle Foster, who's a bit of a bore. Come by the house tonight and I'll introduce you."

"You're sure it's all right?"

"Of course!"

I went, of course, still thinking about Hank Webster. I was beginning to see the attraction this girl held for him, and beginning to suspect their affair wouldn't last very long once she

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was away at college. Her home was in a fashionable section of town, though I was sure her father's salary at the university didn't begin to match what her uncle earned.

Rupert Shane had the appearance of a typical college professor, tall, white-haired, and with a vigorous manner of speaking that made you imagine you were in class, even when you were alone with him in his study at home. "My daughter has mentioned you," he said. "She tells me you'd like to be a lawyer."

"I'm considering it, sir."

"It's a hard life at the beginning. Law school is a grind, and while you're at it there'll be very little time for a social life. You won't even be able to take a job to help with the tuition. Every spare minute will be spent at the books, in study sessions, at the law library."

We talked for close to two hours, and when I got up to leave I was more convinced than ever it was the career for me. "Dad likes you," Martie confided as she led me to the door. "I could tell."

"He's helped me a great deal."

"Come see him again, whenever you want."

I wondered if the invitation extended to her as well. I wondered what would happen when she went away from Hank Webster.

I didn't see her for two days after that. It was the weekend, and I imagined she was out with Hank. On Monday I made a point of stopping by her office, but she was busy with a stack of law books and only had time for a quick smile and a word of greeting.

By Tuesday I had about worked up the courage to invite her to lunch, figuring I could make it sound innocent enough. I happened to be near the lobby newsstand when the early edition of the afternoon paper was dropped off. The big picture on the front page startled me because it was of my old high school math teacher, Mr. Isaacs.

TEACHER SLAIN IN BURGLARY, the headline shrieked. SUSPECT HELD.

I bought a paper and skimmed through the article on the elevator. Isaacs had apparently surprised a burglar in his house shortly after one A.M. He'd been struck and killed with a fireplace poker. A neighbor, attracted by the sight of a flashlight beam moving past a window, had seen a young man running from the house and called the police. They'd arrested a suspect, as yet unidentified, a few blocks from the scene and recovered some stolen objects from his car.

I read it all with a growing sense of doom, and got off the elevator at Martie's floor. As

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soon as I walked in the door and saw her face drained of color I knew it was true. Before I could speak, she told me, "Rich, it's Hank. They've arrested him. They say he killed Mr. Isaacs."

By afternoon the next edition of the paper had changed its headline to TEACHER SLAIN; FORMER STUDENT HELD. Hank's yearbook picture was on page one, alongside that of Mr. Isaacs. "He was driving too fast," the arresting officer was quoted as saying, "like he was running away from something."

Hank's father had phoned Martie that morning and asked if her uncle could handle the case. In the end Foster Shane agreed. He tried to get Hank released on bail, but the judge ruled that since he was unemployed and not living at home with his family he was a bad risk. Bail was set at one hundred thousand dollars, and Hank remained in jail.

"We may be able to get it lowered later," Foster Shane told Martie and me the next day. He was shorter than his brother, and older.

"Can we visit him?" she asked.

"In a day or two."

"You go alone the first time," I told her. "I'll see him later."

She came back after the first visit red-eyed from crying. "It's so awful, Rich, to see him like that."

"What does he say about the night it happened?"

"Not much."

"Does he deny it?"

"No. He just doesn't want to talk about it." She started to cry again. "The police found all those stolen things in his apartment." She held up her wrist. "Even this watch was stolen, I suppose. Or bought with stolen money."

There was nothing I could say to that. My worst fears had been realized.

A week later, following the indictment on charges of second-degree murder, burglary, and related offenses, I finally visited Hank at the county jail. He'd changed so much since that last evening I had trouble recognizing him until he spoke. "Hello, Rich. Nice of you to come."

"Hank, what happened?"

He shrugged and tried to smile. "Fate, I guess."

"But Isaacs, of all people!"

"I swear to God I didn't even know it was his house."

"How did you get started on this insanity?"

"I needed the money. Rich, take care of Martie for me, will you? I know she likes you."

"I'll look after her," I promised. We both knew he wasn't going anywhere for a long time.

The trial didn't open until

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November, after Martie and I were both off to college, but we managed to take a long weekend at home to attend the opening session. The jury had been chosen the week before, so we got to listen to the medical evidence and the testimony of the neighbor across the street who'd seen Hank run from the house.

She was a woman named Mrs. Flagler, and her voice droned on in a flat tone that sounded as if she was on tranquilizers. "I got up a bit after one to go to the bathroom, and I happened to look out the window. Across the street in the Isaacs house I saw a light moving around in the living room—like a flashlight, you know. Just then this young fellow comes running off the porch, carrying a sack of something. That's when I called the police. I didn't know poor Mr. Isaacs was dead till later."

That was when Hank leaped to his feet. He turned and gave a quick glance back to where Martie and I were seated, and then said in a clear voice, "Your Honor, I wish to change my plea. I wish to plead guilty to all charges."

Martie's uncle was resigned to the sudden turn of events. "There was nothing I could do to save him," he told us later. "He was his own worst enemy." The three of us were alone in the courtroom.

"What sort of sentence will he get?" she wanted to know.

"Most likely twenty years to life. With time off for good behavior he could be a free man by the time he's thirty-five."

"Thirty-five . . . "

"He'll still have a life ahead of him."

"That's a long, long time," she said, gazing across the empty courtroom.

"In some ways it would be longer for you than for him," Martie's uncle told her.

Back at college two weeks later, I learned that Hank's sentence had been just as predicted—twenty years to life. I saw Martie during the Christmas recess, and she told me she'd been to visit him. He seemed to be adjusting to prison life. The state prison was about two hours' drive upstate. I planned to visit him myself during the spring recess, but somehow when the time came I never got around to it.

By then I'd started going out with Martie Shane. We announced our engagement at Christmas, and we were married at the end of my junior year.

As I said, in those days we were young. I went on to law school while Martie took a job to sup-

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port me, dropping out of college after our marriage. She visited Hank Webster once after our engagement, to tell him about it, and though she said he took the news well, she never went back. There were plenty of excuses for not going, and after the first year we even stopped sending him Christmas cards. There didn't seem much point in it.

I obtained my law degree and was admitted to the bar, becoming a junior partner in Foster Shane's law firm. I certainly didn't plan to spend my career there, but it was a good beginning. My parents moved to Florida, and Hank Webster's father died of a heart attack. He'd never been right after the trial. It had taken too much out of him to see his son a confessed murderer.

Martie's father still taught law at the university, and though I hadn't gone there for my own degree, he remained friendly and supportive. He certainly approved of having a lawyer for a son-in-law, and had arranged for the position with his brother's firm. He never mentioned Hank Webster, and with the passing years Martie and I spoke less of him.

Our marriage was a happy one, though Martie's working through its first eight years had necessitated our postponing a decision on children. By the time I was firmly established at Shane Associates and she had stopped working, the moment for motherhood seemed to have passed. Her own mother was in ill health and Martie spent part of most days with her. Then she became involved in various civic committees, taking an active interest in the local library and zoo. We entertained often in the evenings, usually inviting my law partners or various clients. Martie had developed into a great cook.

We'd been married some thirteen years, and my earnings were better than fifty thousand dollars a year. It was an ideal life for us both, until one November night about eight o'clock when the telephone rang. Martie went to answer it and came back in a moment looking pale.

"What's wrong?" I asked.

"That was Hank Webster," she said quietly.

"Hank?"

"He's out of jail."

"Has it been fifteen years already?"

"I guess so. He was paroled last week."

"Well . . . where is he?"

"In town. I don't know where. He wanted to come see us Friday night, but I told him we were busy."

"I suppose we should get together with him, welcome him back."

"Rich, he's been in prison! He

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committed a murder! We can't associate with anyone like that."

"I associate with people like that every day."

"I don't mean at the office, I mean at home. We can't have him to our house. He'd probably be looking around for something he could steal!"

"My God, Martie—you practically married the man!"

"I never did! And besides, that was a long time ago. I was still in high school."

I had to agree I wasn't looking forward to seeing Hank again. He was out of our life, and it was probably better if he stayed out. But I didn't see that a brief evening's meeting would commit us to a lasting friendship. "What did he say when you told him we were busy Friday?"

"That he'd call again. I'm afraid I cut him rather short. He took me so by surprise."

"Well, we have to see him. Next time he calls, set something up. If you don't want him here, we can take him out someplace to dinner. It's been a long time since he's had a decent meal."

She stood there looking at me. "He's not home from the army, Rich. He's home from prison. He's a *murderer!* Have you forgotten he admitted killing Mr. Isaacs?"

"I'd like to think he's paid for his crime."

"Fifteen years can't bring back a life."

The discussion was getting us nowhere. "All right, when he calls again, get his number. I'll arrange to meet him alone and make some excuse for you."

That didn't satisfy her. "I don't want you meeting him either, Rich. I don't want us to have anything to do with him!"

She started to cry, and I went to her. "Come on, don't worry about him. He's probably just passing through. He's not going to cause any trouble. He's on parole, remember? Chances are he won't even call again."

After a time I managed to calm her down, and in the morning no more was said about Hank's call. I waited a full week before I asked her one evening, "Did Hank Webster ever call back?"

"No, not yet."

"Just as I thought. He's probably out in California or someplace by now."

"He couldn't travel without permission of his parole officer, could he?"

"That's just a formality. He can be reassigned to one somewhere else."

We were having guests for dinner that night, and they arrived before any more could be said. Once more the subject of Hank Webster was shifted to the back of my mind.

Early the following week I

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took a call at the office while my secretary was on her lunch break. I didn't recognize the voice at first. "This is Rich Ambrose speaking," I said.

"Hello, Rich."

"Who—?"

"It's Hank, Rich. Have you forgotten my voice, too?"

"Hank! Martie told me you called. I was sorry we were busy that night."

"Did she tell you I called four times?"

"Four—"

"I want to see you, Rich."

"Sure, of course. I just don't understand about Martie. What did she say when you called again?"

"Nothing. She just hangs up now. That's why I called you."

"Look, can we meet for a drink after work? I've a court appearance, but I should be free by four or four thirty."

"Where?" Hank asked.

"There's a bar downstairs in my building. The Red Dragon. Meet me there."

He hung up, and I sat staring at the telephone, wondering if I ought to call Martie. Finally I decided against it. No need upsetting her. Hank and I could have a little chat and that would probably be the end of it.

I reached The Red Dragon about ten after four and found Hank Webster at the bar. He'd put on weight since I'd seen him last, and his pale skin reminded me of some of the ex-convicts I occasionally had as clients. I ordered a bourbon and soda and asked him what he was drinking.

"Ginger ale," he replied. "I have to be careful, being on parole."

"Of course. Come on, let's sit in a booth."

The place was almost empty at that time of the afternoon, though I knew it would be crowded in another hour. I led the way to the booth and settled in opposite him.

"You're lookin' good, Rich. Successful lawyer, eh?"

"Mildly successful. I work for it."

"How's Martie?"

"She's well. She keeps busy at various things."

"Any children?"

"No."

Somehow that information seemed to cheer him a bit. "Well, it's good to see you, old man."

"It's been a long time, Hank. I always wanted to get up to see you, but somehow—"

"I know, I know. That's over now. I paid for my crime, as you lawyers like to say."

"I never said that." But I knew I had.

"Anyway, I'm ready to start my new life. I want to see Martie."

I stared into his hard brown eyes, trying to read them. He

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was like a stranger to me then, but maybe he always had been a bit of a stranger. "I guess she doesn't want to see you, Hank. You must be able to understand. Fifteen years is a long time in someone's life. She's not the same girl you knew back then, and I don't think she wants to be reminded of the past."

"I just want to talk to her. I know I can straighten everything out if she'll only talk to me."

"What's there to straighten out, Hank?"

He took a deep breath. "She said she'd wait for me. She said she'd be waiting when I got out."

I was beginning to grow angry. "Look, Hank, we were friends once. All three of us were friends. You made a terrible mistake, and you had to pay for it. No matter what Martie promised you, she couldn't be expected to wait fifteen years. She had her own life to live. We fell in love. We didn't plan it, but that's what happened. She's my wife now."

Hank toyed nervously with his empty glass, as if to keep his hands busy. "I know. I can understand it, Rich. I didn't expect her to stay single for all that time, waiting for me. A woman has certain needs, too. I'm glad she married you, because I know you took good care of her. But now I'm here."

"Damn it, Hank, what are you driving at? What in hell do you want?"

"I want Martie," he said quietly. "I want her as my wife. I'm back and it's time she divorced you. That's what I tried to tell her on the phone."

I slid out of the booth and got to my feet. "I think you're crazy, Hank. I think you're out of your mind!"

"No, I'm not, Rich. I've had fifteen years to keep thinking of her."

I was barely able to contain myself. "Look, you stay away from us, and you stay away from Martie! If I hear of you calling her again, or making any effort to see her, I'll report it to your parole officer. It's harassment and it'll get you right back in prison for the rest of your sentence! You understand that?"

"If I can't have Martie, I might as well be back in prison. That's all I've lived for."

The bartender started toward us, alarmed at our rising voices. I turned quickly and headed for the door. I didn't look back.

Martie was distraught when I told her about it that evening. She paced the floor before dinner, wanting to hear everything he'd said, and yet not wanting to hear it. At one point she covered her ears and started to cry.

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"Why didn't you tell me he'd called again?"

"I thought he would go away, Rich. How could I know he had this insane notion?"

"Did you ever tell him you'd be waiting for him?"

"No! Yes—I don't know! I might have said something foolish. How was I to know he'd try to hold me to it fifteen years later?"

"Look, just calm down now. I think after our talk this afternoon he'll probably see the light. He's not going to bother us any more and risk going back to prison."

After dinner she went upstairs to lie down. I sat near the phone watching television, so I could answer it first in case he tried to call. I didn't really think he would, but I wasn't taking any chances. If he kept trying to phone Martie, I'd have to think about getting an unlisted number.

It was after ten o'clock when I heard her on the stairs. "Rich."

"What is it? Are you all right?"

"Rich—I think he's standing across the street, watching the house."

"You must be imagining—"

"No! Go look!"

I went to the front windows and opened the drapes just enough to look out. The yard across the street had a large pine tree in front of the house, and I seemed to see a shadow moving there. It could have been a person.

"Stay inside," I said. "If I yell out, call the police."

Before she could answer I was out the front door, running straight across the street toward the tree. When he saw me he broke from cover. I caught him with a few quick steps, grabbing his shoulder to whirl him around.

"Rich—"

"I warned you, Hank." I struck out blindly with my fist. It only grazed the side of his cheek as he pulled away.

"Let me see her, Rich. Just let me see her!"

"She won't see you." I began to get control of myself. I wanted to get him away from there as quickly as I could. "Come on," I said, motioning toward my car parked in the driveway. "Get in the car. I'll drive you back to wherever you're staying."

"I want—"

"You're not seeing her! I'm giving you one more chance, Hank, before I call the police."

He climbed into the car reluctantly. I slipped in behind the wheel and backed out of the driveway. "I'm not giving up, Rich. I want Martie."

"Where are you living?" I asked bluntly. He gave me the address of a transient hotel near downtown.

He was silent for most of the ride, until we pulled up in front

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of the place. Then he said, "I guess you just don't understand how it is, Rich."

"There's nothing to understand. She's my wife."

"I spent fifteen years in prison. She owes me that. It was the only thing I had to keep me going—the thought of her, and what it would be like when I was free."

"Get out of the car, Hank. She owes you nothing."

His fingers fastened on the front of my shirt, and for just an instant I felt something like fear. "Damn it, she does! Don't you understand? Martie—"

"Hank, let go!"

"—Martie was with me that night. She's the one who hit Isaacs with that poker."

I drove home in a fog, barely seeing the streets, guided by some inner homing sense. I'd watched him walk into his hotel and wished with all my heart that he was dead, that he'd never lived. But he was there, and those last words of his hung in the air between us. They were words that had to be repeated to Martie, or I would carry them with me the rest of my life.

"Where did you go with him?" Martie asked as I opened the front door. "I was worried sick."

"I drove him downtown, to the place where he's staying."

"What did he say?"

"Nothing much. He still wants to see you."

"Rich, don't ask me to do that."

"I'm not asking you to do anything."

"What's the matter? Something's the matter, isn't it?"

"He said something crazy as he was getting out of the car. He said you were with him the night he robbed the Isaacs house, that you were the one who hit Isaacs."

"My God, Rich—you don't believe him, do you?"

I looked into her terrified face and said, "No. Of course not."

"He must be mad to be making up a story like that! He was alone in the car when they arrested him. He was alone when that neighbor saw him run from the house."

"Of course."

I reached down and brushed her hair and took her in my arms and everything was all right again. "I don't think he'll stay around. That was his last gasp."

"You know better than that. He won't stop until he gets to me, one way or another."

I took a deep breath. "All right, we'll be ready for him. Come on upstairs."

I took her into the closet in our bedroom and unwrapped the .38 caliber snub-nosed revolver I kept there. "I hate that thing, Rich," she said again, re-

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peating her words when I first got a license for it five years earlier. I told her then that I sometimes had to deal with criminals, and it was best to have some protection in the house.

Now I said, "I'm going to load it, and put it back in the closet. If he ever comes here when I'm at work, remember where it is."

"I could never touch it, no matter what he did to me."

"I know, but I want it to be ready." The chambers held only five bullets, and I filled them all.

"You do think he'll come back!"

"I just want to be ready," I repeated.

I slept poorly that night, thinking about Hank Webster and how much he must love Martie to tell me a lie like that about her.

I called home twice from the office the following day, to make sure Martie was all right. She'd heard nothing from him. Then, at the end of the day, I phoned his hotel. They told me he'd checked out around noon.

When I got home for dinner I told Martie the good news. "He's gone. He won't bother us again."

"I hope not. I wish I could believe it."

"He had a sick mind. All those years in prison must have warped him somehow."

We tried to enjoy dinner without talking about Hank, and after she cleared the table I suggested we go out to a movie. It was something to take our minds off it, to get us out of the house.

Martie was upstairs getting ready when the doorbell rang. I opened the front door and saw him there, one hand raised as if to ward off my blows. "I told you to stay away, Hank," I said.

"I'm going. I'm leaving town. But I wanted to talk to you first—you and Martie."

"She won't see you. This latest lie of yours was the limit for her."

"Just you, then. Let me come in."

He was crowding me at the door, and I had little choice unless I used physical force. "Five minutes," I agreed. "Then you leave or I call the police."

"I'll leave."

I led him into the living room and prayed that Martie would not suddenly appear. "Make it fast, Hank," I told him.

"You've got a nice place here. Martie must be very happy."

"Get to the point."

"I didn't want to leave without telling you what happened with Isaacs."

"I've had enough of your lies."

"Just listen, will you? It's important to me to tell you how it

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happened. I'd been breaking into houses, as you know. Martie and I—well, sometimes she went with me. Most times, actually. She liked the excitement. She always wanted to take charge—you must remember that. I swear to God we didn't know it was Isaacs' house. The place was dark and it was well after midnight. We were using flashlights to find our way around on the ground floor. All of a sudden the light went on in the living room and there he was. He'd been dozing in the chair and we hadn't known it."

"He recognized you."

"Sure—he'd taught both of us. He came after me, calling me all sorts of names, and Martie picked up the poker by the fireplace. She hit him with it. He went down hard, and I think we both knew he was dead. She wiped her fingerprints off the poker, and I turned off the light so we wouldn't have to look at him. That's when Martie said if we got caught I should say I did it. I was an accessory after all, and I'd get the same sentence anyway. She talked about her father and her uncle and how it would kill them if she was arrested. She talked about going on to college and how if anything happened to me she'd wait for me. She just stood there being cool and logical when all the time Isaacs was lying there on the floor dead."

I could hear Martie still moving around upstairs.

"And you ran out of the house?"

He nodded. "I just had to get away from there. I ran out and left her. I didn't know what I was doing. I got in the car and drove, and I didn't even realize I had some of the robbery loot with me. That cop picked me up within minutes. When she visited me in jail she told me the same thing—that she'd wait for me no matter how long it took, if I'd say I killed him and leave her out of it. I guess she'd slipped out of the house while the neighbor was on the phone to the police, and no one ever saw her there."

"You expect me to believe this, Hank—that you'd spend fifteen years in prison for something Martie did?"

"I told you, I'd have gone to prison as an accessory anyhow. It didn't make that much difference to me. But it meant everything to Martie. And I loved her, Rich."

"I don't believe you," I said flatly. "You had too many long years in prison to dream this up."

His face was set and grim. "Let me see her, Rich."

"No."

"You're a lawyer. Do you remember the evidence at the trial? Don't you remember what was happening when I jumped

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up and changed my plea to guilty?"

"That woman—the neighbor—was testifying." I remembered as if it were yesterday.

"I changed my plea because suddenly I knew the truth was going to come out about Martie."

"She'd never said anything about Martie; she'd identified you."

"But don't you remember her testimony? She saw a light moving in the living room, like a flashlight—and *while she was watching it* I came running off the porch! Don't you see? By her very testimony there had to be a second person in the house. As soon as someone realized that, they'd know it was Martie. I had to change my plea before the truth came out."

I started to speak, but there was a noise on the stairs. Hank Webster turned and saw her—saw Martie, coming toward him. His face lit up and he rose to meet her and in that instant of looking at him I think I knew the nature of profound love. It was as if fifteen years had dropped away from him and we were all kids again, and he was seeing her the way she was then.

"Martie—"

Then her hand came up from her side and I saw the gun. Her first two shots caught him in the chest and the next two got him as he went down. Her last shot hit him on the floor and she squeezed the trigger one more time on the spent chamber to be sure.

I sat in the chair and stared at it, seeing it all as in a dream. She dropped the empty pistol and came to me, kneeling before me like a supplicant.

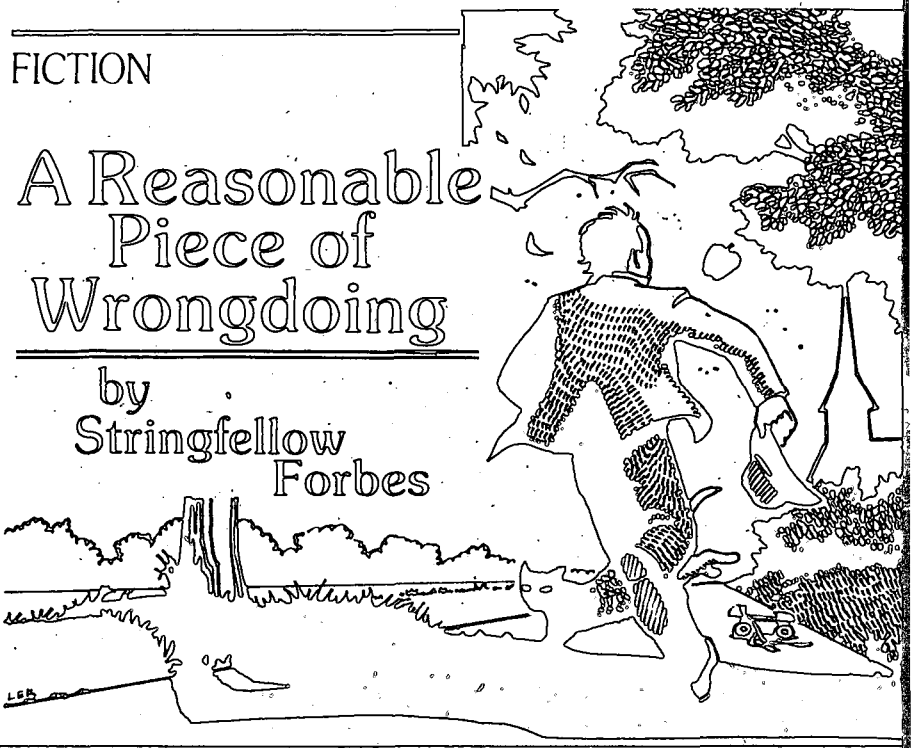
"He had to die, Rich. He was going to harm us. He was going to say terrible things about us. Rich, listen to me—I've wiped off the gun. Can you say you shot him, that he broke into the house to rob us and you shot him? With his record everyone will believe it. We can even break one of the rear windows. Rich, don't you see you have to do this for me? It would kill my father and my uncle if I were involved. I'm only thinking of them, Rich. Tell them you did it, and the case will be closed. Oh, Rich, I love you so much. Tell them, tell them. . . ."

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FICTION

A Reasonable Piece of Wrongdoing

by Stringfellow Forbes



After six weeks of misery, George Alexander took the day off to do some thinking. He cut the grass in the front yard and in the back. Then he lay down in the hammock with a newspaper over his face. At noon his wife brought him a hotdog and a glass of ginger ale. By two o'clock he thought he knew what had happened to him. He was so relieved to have made some sense of things that he felt like a real holiday, and he put his wife and the children in the car and went to the beach. Tomorrow was Saturday and he had to be in the store. So he would wait until Sunday afternoon to figure out what to do about it all.

According to George's new understanding, it had begun after the old man talked to him that night at the store. It was late and George was closing, so he and the boy at the fountain were the only ones there. The old man drifted around looking at the fancy soaps and the after-shaves. Tall and thin, he wore an old seersucker suit that hung in comfortable planes from his shoulders. George hadn't seen such a suit since he was at the university and some

Illustration by Lisa Knouse

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of the older faculty made it their summer uniform. The faded, soft seersucker suit and a narrow black knitted tie gave the old man a vaguely aristocratic look. Except for noticing that, George didn't pay much attention. Then the old man spoke to him across the prescription counter.

"Nice store."

"Why thank you, sir, that's good to hear."

"Must do a lot of business."

George nodded and thought that didn't need an answer. It was his store, and he was modest about it.

"Town like this, lot of old people, you must have a big business just in prescriptions."

George nodded his head a little in agreement and waited to see what the man wanted. He didn't have a prescription form or any merchandise in his hand. The old man looked at him in a considering kind of way, and George noticed that he had a rather loose mouth, red, almost blue on the edges, quirky at the corners, and flexible.

"I want you to make a lot of money," the man said.

"Oh, well . . . " George began. He did make a lot of money but he never admitted it around town.

"I want to help you make a lot of money."

George thought afterward that he must have surely dropped his jaw at that. Only for a minute, though, because this man was a strange one and he wanted to get him on his way and lock up.

"Well, sir, that's real kind of you."

The man's eye held him, and George listened as he went on.

"I get around a little bit in this area and I have a product I want you to handle for me. The distributing is getting to be too much, now I'm not so young any more. But it's a good thing, there's lots of demand, you'll do well off it."

The man put his hand in the pocket of his floppy coat and drew out a small flat package. He laid it on the counter under his palm. All George could see was the plastic edges of it. White powder, plastic bag. A light came on in George's mind, and a flash of indignation flew up his spine. This old man was getting ready to ask him to peddle dope!

"Now, sir," George said. "I really think we got a full line here. I just don't think . . . "

"I see you know what this is. I showed it to you so you would. Don't want any misunderstandings."

"Now sir, you know I . . . " George wondered why he was still

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standing there, speaking with the politeness that was customary, in his town, toward anyone of age. That same politeness held him while the old man laid out his proposition. All the old people that live in these little towns, he said, look at the miserable lives they lead. Living off their sons or sons-in-law, no money to make them independent, no use to anyone. You take this stuff, mix it up so it almost tastes bad—but not quite—color it green, and they come to rely on it. Never, never tell what it is, that goes without saying. But it makes them feel good, they don't fret over things, and the sons and sons-in-law are glad to pay for it. All you need's a prescription from me—oh, yes, I'm a doctor all right.

George thought the old man was crazy. Prescription! There were laws! He didn't think the man was a doctor, he thought this was some sort of big city dope dealing that was moving out to the smaller towns. He knew he wasn't going to do it, and he said so time and again. The man left but he came in the next day and gave George a wink and a tip of his hat. George hardly looked at him. A few days later the man was there again at closing time. He talked earnestly about humanitarianism and profit until George left the counter and went to the storeroom, where he couldn't see the old man's eye and his blue-red mouth.

"You'll be sorry," were the last words he heard, though they were spoken softly and with regret.

That night when George went home, he was bothered by moths. Small white moths beat around his head at every street light. He found spots on his face where he had slapped at them.

The moths were the beginning. After that there was no end to the variety of small disgusting things that happened to George. He went into a room at a party and felt a spider web catch on his nose. As his friends were introducing him to the guest of honor, George was brushing his face, unable to rid himself of the web. His son fell and cut his chin. At the emergency room, George unaccountably found himself afflicted with a thick Scottish brogue, and the attendants couldn't understand a word he said. His tires leaked air, his sewer backed up, the barber slipped with the clippers and left a white spot halfway up George's head. At dinner, the lettuce on George's plate was spotted with mud, the cream curdled in his coffee, his glasses fell in the soup, he sat on a buttered roll, and there were so many things that could happen to spinach, he gave up eating it entirely. When he turned to kiss his wife, she had crumbs on her mouth. He yelled at her and she said they weren't there, wiped her whole face with the napkin, and George still saw

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crumbs. He wet the bed, took one glass of wine and passed out, after mauling his wife's best friend, stood up to make a speech at the PTA and could only stammer. For a whole day, one eye leaked water down his face. Shaving was a hazard every time.

What George had figured out was that he had been cursed by the Devil. Well, maybe not cursed, the Devil could surely do a lot worse than this if he were seriously offended. But by refusing such a reasonable piece of wrongdoing, in the Devil's view anyway, George had miffed some kind of power of evil, and all this hatefulness was to pay him back.

On Sunday, George lay in the hammock again. The mosquitoes were bad and ants had found a spot of ginger ale on his arm, but he set his mind to ignoring them and persevered with his thinking. By five o'clock he had a plan.

If this was the Devil he was dealing with, he couldn't be in much worse trouble if he offended God by doing something bad. George didn't think God would be as nasty as this and things were supposed to be negotiable with Him.

The next day, for the first time in his life, George Alexander changed a prescription. His mother-in-law was healthy as a horse, but she had a thing about digestion. George was expected to provide her with the latest in antacid pills. He substituted tranquilizers and took them to her house. It hadn't been easy to decide on the proper degree of wrongdoing but he had found right away, with his hand hovering over the medicine shelves, that he just wasn't capable of anything really harmful.

Now he knew he had sinned. There was a definite weight of guilt in his breast, he looked sidelong at his customers, and he watched his mother-in-law for signs of stomach trouble. For the first time in her life she was serene. She stopped snapping at her husband, she no longer pulled at the children's clothes when she saw them, and she told his wife George was a good father.

George became interested in this experiment of small wrongdoing to balance the piety that had caused all this recent trouble. He tested his level of guilt every day, hoping to keep it just high enough to placate the Devil and low enough to avoid offending God. The tranquilizers weren't really dangerous, but it was the substitution that counted. His mother-in-law was doing so well on them, though, that George began to worry that what he'd done was a benefit and might work against him.

The nasty little happenings dropped off, but they didn't stop altogether. One day, talking to a customer, he began to stammer

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again and bit his tongue almost through. That night he increased the dose in his mother-in-law's bottle and felt so guilty and afraid he could hardly draw breath. But he took it to her and thought he'd see what would happen now.

What happened was that she thought so much of those little pills of George's that she took them all day long, and one night she dropped into a coma and had to be taken to the hospital in an ambulance. George thought the time had come to go to church. He fell on his knees in the back yard and felt his ankle pierced by a sharp stone. He got out the car and started downtown to the Baptist church. Turning the first corner, the wheels locked and the car ran into a frail picket fence, which didn't stop it. He left it against a tree in his neighbor's yard and ran toward town. Cats streaked under his feet, skates and tricycles loomed on the sidewalks, apples dropped on his head, and dust swirled in his face. Half blind and limping, he fell against the church door. It was locked but there was a porch before it, so he figured he was inside.

"Lord, I didn't mean to do it."

That was a lie. Better start again.

"Lord, please don't let anything bad happen to my mother-in-law."

Better. He breathed more slowly.

"Lord, the Devil made me do it."

He tried to think what to say next. He waited a long time, just breathing in the dark, half lying on the doorstep. He was tired, he couldn't struggle any longer.

"Forgive me, Lord, for I have sinned."

That sounded right to him, so he said it again. He fell asleep saying it.

When he got home his wife was crying because he had left the children asleep and alone in the house and she hadn't known where he was when she got back from the hospital. He held her and smoothed her hair.

"How's your mother?"

"Oh. They pumped her out and we took her on home. She went on and on at Daddy about how much the ambulance was going to cost."

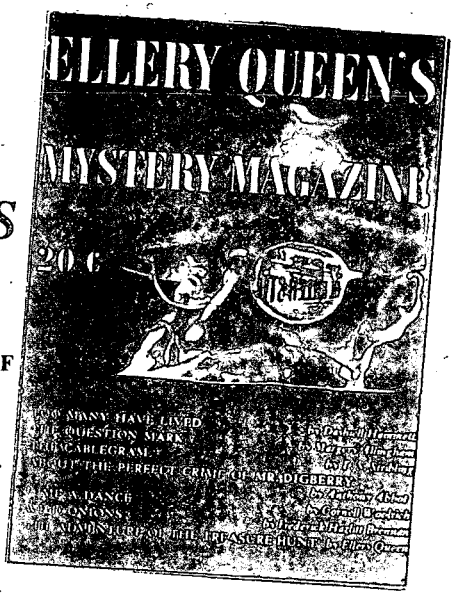
George sighed. That was the end of that, he guessed. All his guilt was gone, and he knew he'd never be able to try anything like that again. He turned the bed down and ran his hand carefully over the sheet. No sand, no crumbs. Ah well, it was late and he couldn't be worried. He slept soundly and shaved himself next morning without a sign of blood.

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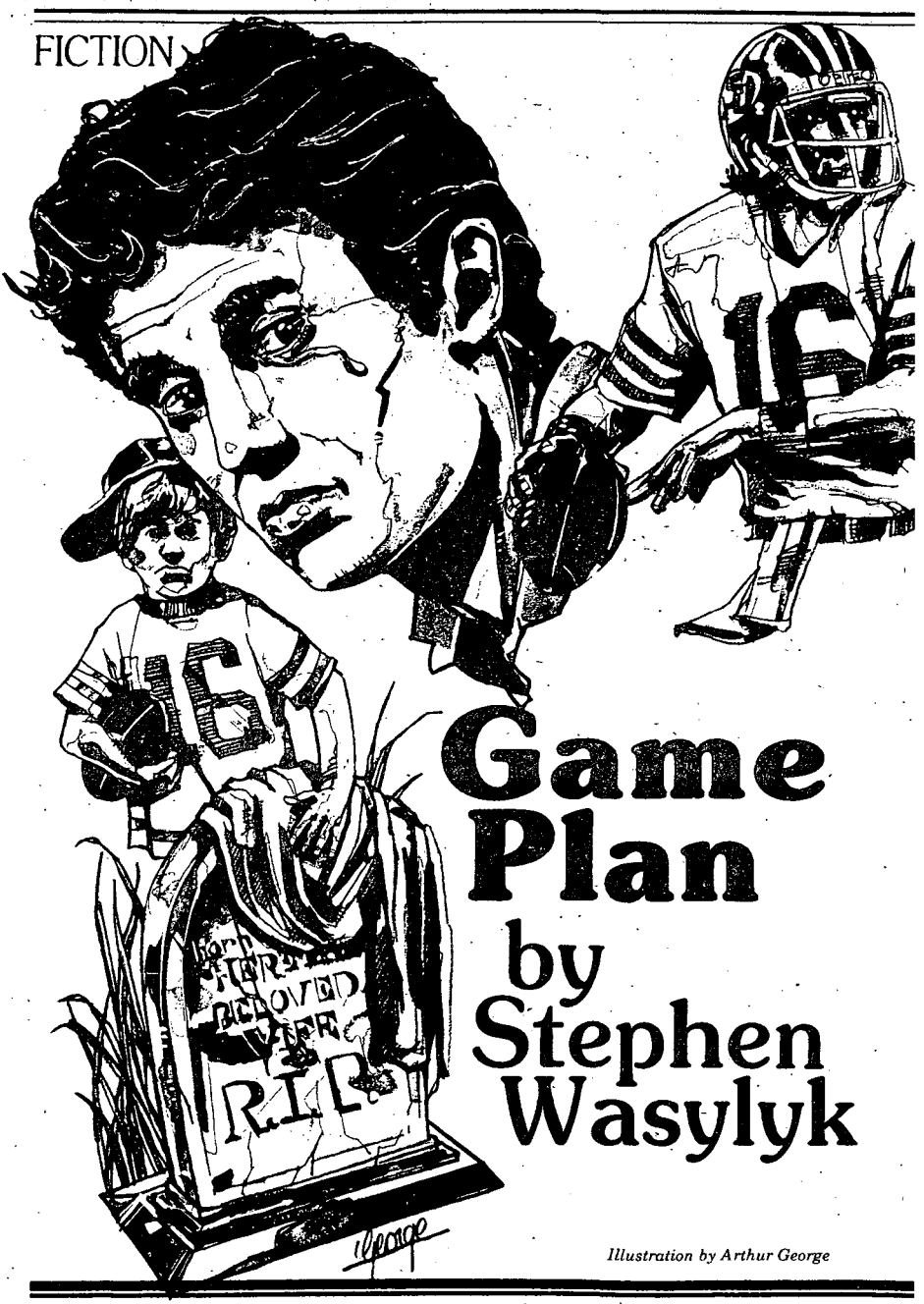
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FICTION



Game Plan

by Stephen Wasylyk

Illustration by Arthur George

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Neither mentioned it until Max swung the car out into the traffic flowing by the airport, then Sandi twisted to face me, her blonde cheerleader prettiness solemn, and announced, "Paul has disappeared, you know."

The seat on the big jet had been cramped, but that was nothing like the lack of comfort for a big man in the rear seat of their compact. I shifted to a more comfortable position, letting her words sink in.

"Exactly what do you mean by disappeared? Just haven't heard from him or what?"

"Disappeared. Gone," said Max. "Not seen or heard of. Two weeks ago. No one knows where he is. This neighbor, Barclay, became concerned when he didn't see him. Paul had said nothing about going away, and he always had in the past. Barclay worried a few more days and then called the police, thinking maybe they had someone unidentified in a hospital or something. Nothing. Now the police are carrying Paul on the records as a missing person." Concern touched his voice. "If he were dead, there would be a body, wouldn't there?"

"I would think so. When did you last see him?"

"At the trial." He twisted the wheel and gunned past a semi. "Can you imagine? The guy kills Paul's wife, is caught cold, no doubt whatsoever that he's guilty, but he walks out free as a bird because of some damned quirk in the law. I tell you—"

"How did Paul take it?"

"I think he was stunned. He should have been jumping up and down and screaming, but he just walked out of the courtroom when the judge dismissed the charges. We caught up with him outside. He shook hands, thanked us for coming, said he'd be in touch, and that was the last we saw or heard from him."

"I should have been there," I said slowly. "The only time I regretted taking that job in Saudi Arabia was when I heard what happened. Tried to talk my way into a trip home, but since I had less than a year to go, they weren't buying anything except immediate family emergencies."

"Nothing you could have done," said Sandi. "Really. I don't know what anyone could have done. Paul waited nine months for the man to come to trial and then saw him walk out absolutely free and clear. Don't they ever think of the victims in these things? Jenna was the light of Paul's life."

"I'll agree with that," said Max. "Too bad you never met her, Sam."

I thought so, too. "Maybe there's something I can do now to make amends," I said. "I'll

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rent a car tomorrow and drive up there and see if I can find out what happened to him."

"I was hoping you would," said Max. "Like to go with you, but I just can't get away. Don't have the brains for something like that, anyway. You do. After you talk to Barclay and the police, maybe you can figure something out."

Sandi smiled. "Sam, did I tell you how glad we are that you're home?"

I grinned. "Tell me again. It's nice to hear."

I settled back and let the concrete world we were in flow by.

Only five years ago, we'd have been playing football for the university on an afternoon like this, the three of us. I had been the quarterback, Paul the halfback, and big Max the fullback. We went undefeated in our senior year, winning the conference with ease. No bowl games for us, however. Or the pros. Not where we played. Football was only a character building game, and for fun. I don't know how much character it had built, but we'd had fun and off the field had become close.

After graduation, Paul's degree in chemistry had landed him with a pharmaceutical firm in northern New Jersey, Max's in business had brought him to Philadelphia, and mine in engineering had taken me to Saudi Arabia under a five year contract. It was time well spent. With no way to live up to my generous salary, I had enough money now to take my time in looking around.

Everything has its drawbacks, however. Being away had caused me to miss Paul's wedding. I was sorry about that. I was sorrier for not being on hand when his wife was killed during an aborted purse snatching, the brutal tearing at her handbag causing her to fall and strike her head on the curb, the perpetrator caught within a block. And subsequently set free, as Max had said, because the police hadn't done something they should or did something they shouldn't.

Max hit an off ramp and said over his shoulder, "We'll be at the house in a few minutes."

That suited me fine. Between jet lag and the few days I'd spent in Paris on the way home, my eyelids creaked from the effort it took to hold them open.

I left the next morning with the understanding that I'd return as soon as I knew something. Concern for Paul had erased any thought of a celebration of my return. Disappearing like that was uncharacteristic of Paul. He lived his life the way he ran the football—controlled, precise, calculated. Something had to have

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happened to him—or the death of Jenna had thrown him off the track. Either way, he needed help.

The car purred its way up the New Jersey Turnpike to the Elizabeth area where I promptly became lost following the map Max had drawn for me. An hour later, I stumbled onto the right street and the right number and pulled to the curb in a small town that still retained its character and autonomy.

The house was a handsome combination of red brick, dark wood, and shrubbery at the end of a broad lawn fronting a quiet, tree-lined street, yet somehow it gave off a feeling of neglect, even though under a tree of the house next to it, a stout man wearing a bright red jacket and a flat-topped hat scraped at fallen leaves, and the bags he had already accumulated testified that he had raked Paul's lawn before starting on his own.

He leaned on the rake as he watched me approach.

"Barclay? I'm Sam Stroud. A friend of Paul's."

He grinned and held out his hand. "A pleasure to meet you. Saw you and Paul and Max play many times. Paul spoke of you often. You were overseas, he said."

I nodded. "I didn't know until yesterday that he's disappeared. Any word?"

He let the rake drop. "Come on in. We'll have a drink and I'll tell you what I know."

The drinks were half gone when he said, "I don't understand it. Really I don't. Not the shock of Jenna's death. I mean his disappearing. Leaving everything."

"He said nothing to you?"

"Not a word. Saw him drive off the day after the guy was set free and never thought anything of it. Then my wife—she's out shopping now—noticed the mail and newspapers piling up, so I went over and put them inside. No sense advertising a house is unoccupied in this day and age. After a week, we became worried, so I called the police and reported him missing. The next day a detective named King stopped by. Nothing, he said. Checked all the hospitals and bodies in morgues. No one of Paul's description. They found his car, though. It had been parked on the east side of town and had been towed to the impound yard. No clues in that, either. Said they'd keep the matter alive, but there wasn't much more they could do. That was last week. I haven't heard from them since."

He finished the drink in one gulp. "Where in the hell can he be?"

"Sounds as though he left town."

He shook his head. "Without a word to anyone and with

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everything just sitting here? Okay, maybe he didn't want to live in that house any longer, but why not just make arrangements to sell it? He knew I'd handle it for him if that was what he wanted."

"Maybe he didn't care," I said quietly.

"Maybe not. You want another drink?"

"No, thanks. I'd like to talk to King. Where will I find him?"

"City Hall. You passed it on the way in. Listen, anything I can do to help, just let me know."

"I think you've done more than your share already. Paul would appreciate it." I paused at the door. "Would you know where his wife is buried? I never met her, but still, since I wasn't here for the funeral—"

He nodded. "Mount Laurel. About five miles out of town on the main road."

When I glanced into the rear view mirror as I pulled away, he had picked up his rake again. One helluva nice guy and a good neighbor, I thought. Most people wouldn't have given a damn.

I found King at a desk on the second floor of the city hall, a nineteenth century building decorated with ornate stone carvings and located across the street from a small park. He was a slight man with gray hair and a habit of clearing his throat before he spoke, a device that evidently gave him more time to get his thoughts in order.

"Sure, we're still working on it," he said. "These things are carried on open file until we get an answer one way or the other."

"What do you think happened to him?"

He shrugged. "Who can say? He can be dead or he can be living within a block of this building. On the other hand, he could have taken off. We're not that far from New York City."

"Let's take the first possibility. You feel that if something had happened to him, you would have known about it?"

"Don't see how we could have missed. A body is a body and has to be identified. I'm not talking about this town only, you know. His description was circulated. If he was in a hospital or morgue somewhere, we would have heard. I'll admit that there are a few rivers in the area where we occasionally turn up a body or two, but that opens another question. Who would want to kill him and hide the body? As far as we could tell, he had no enemies."

"And the second possibility —that he's still in town?"

"Not very likely. What would be the point?"

I saw what he meant. The town was small enough so that Paul could reach any part of it within twenty minutes from his

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house. Why should he want to live elsewhere?

"That leaves us with the last option, which in my opinion, is the right one," he said. "He took off."

I rose and stood at the window. "Broken up over his wife and the man who killed her being released?"

"Something like that. I've got to tell you this. There are three banks in town. We called two before we found the one that carried his checking account. The day Barclay says he disappeared, your friend cashed a check for a thousand dollars."

A handful of kids were playing a rough brand of touch football in the park across the street. One, smaller than the others, caught a pass and took a few steps. A heavy kid, far bigger than he was, didn't bother merely to tag him. He took him by the shoulders and threw him down. The smaller kid came off the turf like a rubber ball, jawing at the big kid. The big kid laughed.

"A thousand dollars in his pocket," I said. "How's that for a motive for a mugging?"

"Okay, but then he'd be in a hospital or morgue." King shook his head. "Sorry. I still say he took off. Want some advice? I've got to tell you we just don't have the time or the manpower to really look for people." He held up a hand as though warding off my next remark. "I know, but we can only do so much. If you really want to find this guy, hire a private detective. Those guys have the time and know all the angles."

The small kid across the street had caught another pass. This time he was in the clear, running fast, the big kid coming up to meet him. Even at that distance, I could see the anticipatory grin on the big kid's face as he expected the little guy to try to juke past him. The little kid had other ideas. Instead of dodging, he waited until the last split second, lowered his head, and charged into the big kid, leveling him and leaving him gasping on the ground. The little kid dropped the ball contemptuously.

I turned from the window. "I just may take your advice."

"Private investigators cost a bundle, but they produce results."

I nodded. "Whatever happened to the man who killed Paul's wife?" My memory dredged up a name. "Ben Hedge."

"Kid, you mean. He's only eighteen, which is old enough to get him on our books a couple of times already. He'll be back on the blotter again, though. His kind usually is."

"His kind?"

"Something wrong with him. Big Bennie is definitely head-

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shrink material. Ran him by a psychiatrist or two while he was a juvenile, but the mother was opposed and without her cooperation, it wouldn't work."

I lifted a hand. "Thanks for your help."

At the top of the marble entrance steps, I watched the football game for a few minutes, long enough to see the ball going the other way now. A long pass arched toward the big kid running down the field. The little guy raced across on defense. From where I stood, it looked as though he could have simply intercepted the ball, but he waited and threw himself into the big kid just as the ball touched his hands. The big kid went down again.

The little kid reminded me of Paul. He played the same way. Never let anyone get away with anything.

As Barclay had said, the cemetery was easy to find. An elderly gentleman at the gatehouse gave me the grave location, and I drove through winding lanes below brilliantly-leaved trees, markers lined up in precise rows on either side of the road. Evidently it was the newer section where headstones weren't permitted because off in the distance they still stood.

I found the simple brass plaque embedded in the flat concrete slab, sorry that I had never met the woman who lay beneath it. She had written me soon after she and Paul had married. I had kept the letter, along with the photo Paul had sent when he first met her, and there were nights when I wondered if it was possible to fall in love with a woman when all you had was a letter and a picture.

I'd never know, now.

There were benches here and there along the gravel path and I sat back, thinking of King's suggestion. Perhaps a private detective might be the answer. I wasn't making any progress and whatever it cost, it would be worth it to ease the nagging uneasiness I felt.

A hundred yards away, a slim kid rode a power mower, churning through fallen leaves as he cut the grass, the engine harsh for the surroundings even at that distance.

A great many of the graves had a small vase of flowers alongside. Something about those next to Jenna's drew me, but it wasn't until I touched them that I realized what it was.

They were fresh. The others were artificial.

I hurried across the grass to the kid on the mower and flagged him down. He turned off the engine, mopped his brow, and nodded.

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"Something I can do for you?"

"One of the graves over there has fresh flowers. The others are artificial. Do you know who put them there?"

"Sure. The guy from the florist's. Replaces them every couple of days. Nothing unusual about it. He has quite a few stops to make in here."

I relaxed and turned away. Keeping fresh flowers at Jenna's grave was something Paul would do.

"Tell you what is unusual, though," said the kid. "People arrange for fresh flowers for a time after someone dies—a period of mourning, I guess. Then others come on certain days — you know anniversaries, Memorial Day, things like that. This is the first time I've seen the flowers start almost a year after the person died."

"How long has it been going on?"

"Two weeks."

Two weeks. Two weeks since Paul disappeared.

"I suppose you know the florist?"

"Sure. Magee's. Why?"

"You said it was unusual. I agree."

He provided me with the address and directions.

The shop was small and filled with that pleasant odor of all florists, the fragrances intermingling so that you had to be an expert to separate them. I was no expert.

The woman who came forward was small, wearing glasses much too large for her thin face, her dark hair straight and cropped short.

"May I help you?"

"Perhaps," I said. "You've been providing flowers for the grave of Mrs. Jenna Croft at Mount Laurel cemetery. I'd like to know who placed the order."

She frowned slightly. "Is something wrong?"

"Not with your service. I assume Mr. Croft ordered them?"

She reached out and shifted some small flowers appearing to grow out of the back of a ceramic donkey. "No. Not Mr. Croft."

I waited. Her eyes flicked up to mine as if demanding I ask the question.

"Who did order them?"

"Mrs. Hedge."

I let the name sink in for a few moments. "The mother—"

"Of the boy who killed her." The shoulders lifted. "I suppose it's her way of expressing her regret."

Not Paul then, I thought, the hope that I had a lead quickly cut down. Still, it was a little odd. Why should the mother order the flowers now, after the boy had been set free?

"I wonder if you can give me her address."

"I suppose there's no harm." She ran a finger down the page

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of an order book. "Eighty-five Green Tree Terrace."

"How do I get there?"

"It's on the east side of town." She gave me directions. "But why do you want to talk to her?"

"Because I really don't know what else to do at this point," I said.

Green Tree Terrace didn't have a green tree in sight. It was a busy street lined with small shops with living quarters above, most of the buildings only two stories high; a small business district barely surviving on neighborhood trade now that the big malls drew the crowds that used to come here. At the corner was a three story apartment house. Once a nice place to live because of its convenience, it was rundown and shabby, the kind of place where people stay only until they can move on to something better and where few questions are asked so long as the rent is paid promptly.

Number 85 turned out to be a small laundry and dry cleaning shop that obviously catered to the local carry-in trade.

One of those tinkling bells hung on a spring sounded when I pushed open the door, summoning a woman of Amazonian dimensions from behind a rack of plastic-sheathed clothing.

She completely dominated the small room; her posture ramrod straight, chin high, impenetrable flint-like eyes reinforcing an aura of inflexibility and severity.

Any would-be holdup man with designs on the contents of the battered old cash register would probably think twice before committing himself.

"Mrs. Hedge?"

Her eyes flicked over me. She saw no laundry or dry cleaning in my hands, so she concluded I was there for some other reason. She waited.

I took a deep breath. "You've arranged for flowers to be placed on the grave of a Mrs. Croft?"

Her voice had an edge. "Is there a law against it?"

"Certainly not. I'm a friend of Mr. Croft and I wondered why. Especially since—"

"Since my son killed her," she said flatly.

It was my turn to wait.

"Did you ever think of minding your own business?" she asked.

A blond young man, as big as she was but still retaining the softness of youth in his round face, came out from the back and stood watching us, his fleshy arms folded.

"It is my business, in a way. Mr. Croft has been missing for two weeks, and I'm trying to find him. I saw your flowers at the cemetery and thought he

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was responsible but found out that you were."

Her nostrils flared. "And that seemed strange to you? It seems to me that I am more obligated than anyone else." Her chin lifted. "I know that people say my son should have been locked up, but if it will make them feel better, I've decided he will not go unpunished. They wanted to put him in prison, but what good would that do? When the judge let him go, I brought him home and here he'll stay. Judges aren't the only ones who can pass sentence, you know."

"I don't quite follow you," I said.

Her voice became hard. "Perhaps I failed somewhere, but I won't fail now. He will pay for the flowers out of the money I give him for helping in the shop. It's a small thing, but it's the least he can do. And this is his prison—this shop and our apartment upstairs. He won't leave until I say he can."

I glanced at her son. He was standing somewhat behind her, his eyes fixed on her back, with a glitter of deep hate. Headshrink material, King had said.

"You intend to keep him in this place? For how long?"

"What would his sentence have been from the judge?" she demanded fiercely. "Five years? Ten? Whatever it would have been, it will be the same here. He will not leave this place until he has served his time for his wrongdoing, no more than he could have left wherever they had put him. Not one foot, not one step outside of the door for any reason." Her voice rang in the small shop, laced with righteousness. Whatever she had forgiven him for in the past was done. There would be no forgiving, no leniency now.

The hate was bright on the kid's face, and the whole thing was as easy to read as an open book. A woman of her strength would completely dominate him as he was growing up, and he had grown to hate her. The trouble King had mentioned was probably his way of rebelling. Now there was this.

Her uncompromising resolve to punish him, even though the law had not, might have been unique and commendable. It was also ill conceived. A prison had walls, bars, and guards for a reason. If she believed she could hold him inside the shop, she was wrong.

When the judge had dismissed the charges, the boy had expected to be free, and when she had sprung this on him, she had given him a focal point for his long hatred, a justification for anything he might do, and what he had in mind was written plainly on his face.

Within those four walls, the ingredients of a tragedy to come permeated the air like the lin-

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gering essence of the dry cleaning chemicals.

None of which had anything to do with me or finding Paul.

I inclined my head. "Thank you for the flowers. I'm sure Mr. Croft will be appreciative."

I walked out and picked my way through the traffic to where I had left the car. I sat there, thinking. I was no wiser than I had been when I drove into town that morning. I had been barging around without thought, which was as stupid as going into a ball game against a tough, alert defense without having a game plan.

My uneasiness was accented by the episode in the shop, yet what connection could there be between her action and Paul's disappearance?

Start from the beginning, I told myself. Obviously, he must have had a destination and a use for the thousand dollars. He had left the car because he had no use for *it*, so to get out of town, he would require some form of transportation. The only alternative he had would be a bus—but what purpose would that serve? Wherever he'd been headed, he'd reach his destination far faster and more easily in his own car.

The more I kicked it around, the more I couldn't see him doing that. He had gone nowhere. But if he hadn't left, where had he been for the past two weeks? It was as though he had gone under cover.

I sat up slowly, my hands suddenly clammy. Under cover. It began to come together then. I cursed my stupidity. No one knew him as well as I did, and I'd seen that kid playing football in the park, which should have told me what to look for then and there.

I left the car and studied the street, evaluating and discarding possibilities the way I used to select plays. Except this time I had the feeling I had to pick a game winner or it would be all over. Fourth down, I thought, and it's win or lose.

I walked down to the apartment house.

A crooked sign inside the door said the superintendent occupied 1A. I tapped at the door.

The superintendent was short and fat and annoyed that I'd taken him away from the blaring television that filled the room with harsh sound.

"You want an apartment?"

I took a hopeful breath. "I'm looking for a friend who moved in about two weeks ago. I've forgotten the aparment number. Man about my age, black hair, a little on the thin side."

There was a pause that brought a touch of panic.

"Oh, him," he said. I began to breathe again. He gestured toward the stairs. "2C in the

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front. Listen, is he a nut or something?"

"Why?"

"Went into that room and as far as I know, he never came out. Has his food sent in from the coffee shop. Something wrong with him?"

"He's writing a novel and doesn't want to be disturbed."

"That's what I thought," he said. "A nut."

I could feel his suspicious eyes on me as I mounted the stairs. Whatever he was thinking didn't bother me. I had guessed right.

I tapped at the door of 2C. And tapped again. And waited.

I leaned close and said, "I'm not leaving, Paul."

A lock clicked and the door opened.

He looked a great deal older because of the sunken eyes and the two weeks' growth of beard.

"What the hell do you want, Sam?"

"Is that a way to greet an old friend?"

"I saw you from the window," he said resentfully. "Couldn't believe it was you going into that shop. Why?"

I told him about the flowers.

He shrugged. "That isn't going to help. Not now. How did you find me?"

"A little straight thinking. Which is more than I can give you credit for."

I pushed past him into the room. It had obviously been furnished with pieces other tenants had left behind when they moved out. A large, shabby easy chair stood before the window, a small table alongside. He had thrown a sweater over the table as though to conceal something. I didn't have to be told what the bulge was.

I gestured toward the window. "Clear view of the dry cleaning shop. All you have to do is wait for him to come out. One shot from that gun and the score would be even. And before anyone knew what had happened, you'd be gone. Do you think you could get away with it?"

"They'd have to prove it."

"Which probably wouldn't have taken more than twenty-four hours. Luckily for you, you've sat here for two weeks and haven't seen him. Did you ever ask yourself why?"

"He can't hide forever."

"He's not hiding. He's in prison."

"The hell he is. I was there when the judge let him go."

"The mother," I said. "She's passed sentence on him herself. She's keeping him locked up. For five years or ten or whatever, she says."

His eyes narrowed. "That isn't very funny, Sam."

"You saw me over there."

"If she told you that, she's crazy."

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"Maybe she is, but she intends to make it stick. At any rate, he's not coming out, so get your things and let's get out of here."

"No," he snapped harshly.

"You don't have a choice. I don't intend to let you sit here like some sort of avenging angel and shoot him. If you want to fight, I'm ready. I don't know which of us will win, but it doesn't matter, because five minutes after we start, the guy downstairs will call the cops and we'll both be in jail tonight. Furthermore, if this stupidity had some purpose to it in the beginning, it has none now."

He looked as though he wanted to test me. He'd waited nine lonely months to see justice done and had been denied, and it had pushed him to the limit. Now the obsession for revenge that had gripped him for two weeks was difficult to shake off.

I moved to the window and motioned him to join me. "Look over there. She's so convinced she's doing the right thing, she's fanatical about it, but like many mothers, she's blind to what she's created in her son. I could be wrong, but when the kid walks out, you won't have to shoot him. He'll already be dead. Do you understand what I'm trying to say?"

It took a long time for him to nod slowly. "I suppose people like that dig their own graves," he said quietly. "If not today, then tomorrow. I should have seen that."

"You see it now." I tossed the sweater to him, tucked the long-barrelled .38 into my waistband, and buttoned my jacket over it. "Let's go."

On the way to the car, he said softly, "You almost didn't make it, Sam."

I nodded.

"I had that feeling."

"I told you I thought he was hiding, so I didn't intend to wait any longer. I was going over there before they closed the shop at five and kill him. If you'd been a half hour later, I'd have been gone."

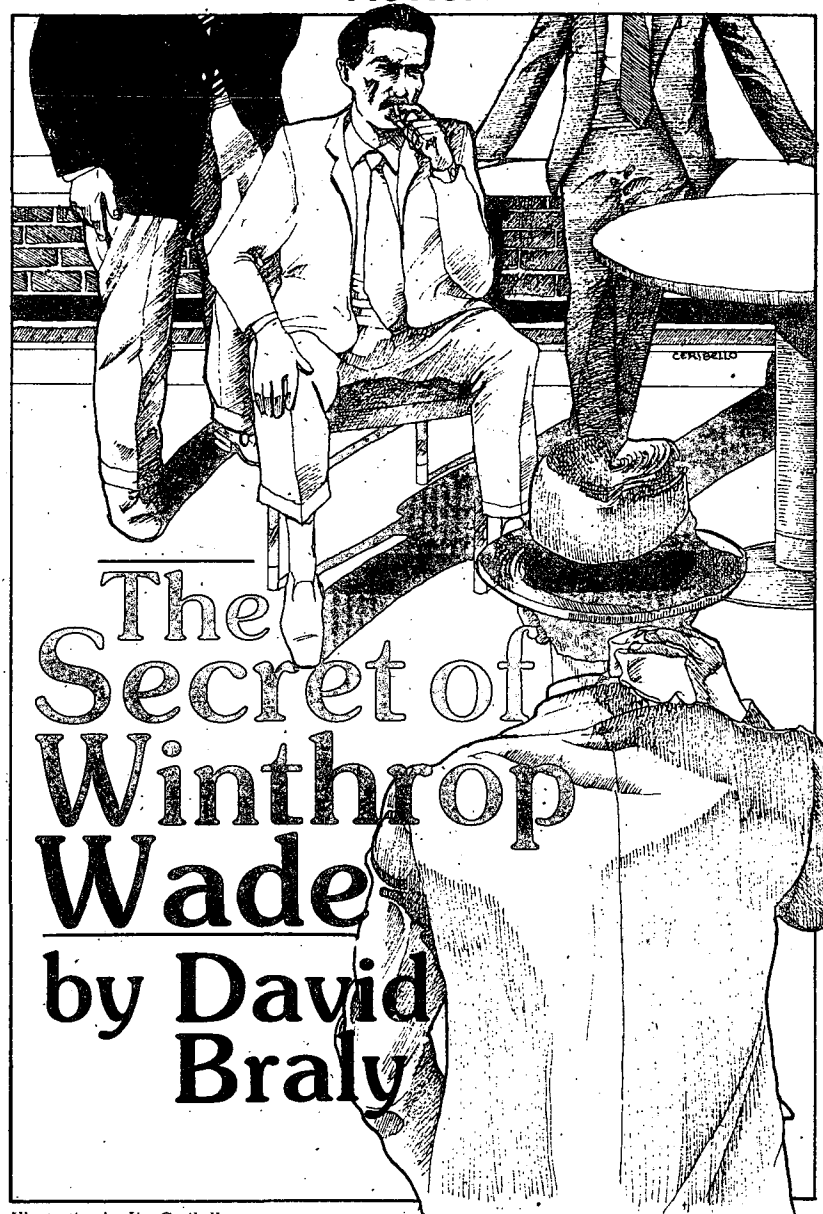
I'd been right about its being fourth down. I'd gambled and won and the game was over.

This game.

Across the street, Ben Hedge sullenly padded slowly back and forth, his figure distorted into flickering light and shadow by street reflections in the plate glass, only the white face clearly defined.

The hate still there said that game had yet to be played.

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The Secret of Winthrop Wade

by David Braly

Illustration by Jim Ceribello

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As the cab turned onto the Avenue María Cristina, Colin Douglas glanced at his Omega wristwatch and saw that the time was three minutes before two o'clock. He had only three minutes to reach the restaurant and find a man he'd never previously met if he were going to be on time for his appointment with Winthrop Wade. And Wade was probably the sort of man who hated to be kept waiting. Criminal masterminds were probably like that.

A minute later the cab pulled to the curb in front of the huge restaurant. The driver told him what the fare was, and Douglas knew that it was too high. Perhaps double what it should be. That happened sometimes when a man wore a Brooks Brothers suit and Gucci shoes. He considered ordering the cab driver to take him to the nearest *comisaría,* hoping that the driver would relent rather than have the police involved, but he decided not to. The driver's rough, weathered face was dominated by cold grey eyes that looked at Douglas with the perfect steadiness of a man who wouldn't be bluffed. And bluff is all that it would be. Douglas dared not miss his appointment with Wade, and he would if the driver drove him to the *comisaría* and argued his case there. In fact, he would be late if they argued here with each other. The driver could probably see his impatience. Douglas was sure that it showed.

He paid and got out. The driver, who hadn't even bothered to smile, drove off, turning at the next intersection toward the Plaza España.

Douglas glanced at a beautiful fountain in the distance. Enormous in size, its crystal spray was a sharp contrast to the smog that hung through the city behind it. He wondered if the smog was always this dense in Barcelona. Probably not. There was no wind, no breeze today, just hot, stagnant air, and that was probably why the smog was so bad. After glancing at the fountain, he turned around and walked into the restaurant.

Inside, Douglas found at least two hundred diners present. Maybe more. He couldn't see how many were on the terrace. It looked as large as the ground floor; another two hundred might be up there. He'd been told only to meet Winthrop Wade at La Pérgola. No one had mentioned whether he was to meet him on the ground floor or on the terrace, and still less had a specific table been indicated.

A man approached him. He was tall for a Spaniard, dark, with a hard, sharply etched face that looked as though it'd been

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in quite a few fights. In his tattered brown suit he looked for all the world like a typical European peasant in his holiday strolling clothes. Douglas thought that if the man wasn't now a peasant he had been once.

"Señor Douglas," said the man, nodding slightly. He said it as a statement, not as a question. "I am Carlos Romero. I am in the employ of the Señor Wade."

"Glad to meet you, Señor Romero." Douglas shook hands with him. Romero's hand was soft, free of calluses. Maybe Douglas had been wrong about his having been a peasant.

"The Señor Wade told me to meet you and drive you to him," said Romero. His voice was deep and raspy.

"I was instructed to meet Wade here."

"*Sí,* but it is I who am meeting you. I will drive you to Señor Wade. He is using a house outside the city. No one knows he is there. These precautions are necessary. Señor Wade has enemies."

Douglas smiled. "*Sin duda.*"

"I am glad you understand. My car is in a parking lot a few blocks from here."

Fifteen minutes later Romero guided a black Mercedes out into the traffic. Douglas was seated next to him, his back already moist against the leather seat. Romero switched on the air conditioner, but it took time to cool the interior of the car.

"It's hot," said Douglas, trying to make conversation.

"*Sí.*"

"Sweltering!"

"*Sí,* sweltering."

Douglas locked his arms across his chest and slid down slightly in his seat. He looked out the windows at the buildings and vehicles and people. Eventually the city became the country. The country was beautiful. Spring had turned everything green.

After a forty-five minute drive Romero turned the car onto a paved, private road that led to a long, tall white wall. Douglas could see the red tile roof of a house beyond, but the wall hid the lower part of the building from view. Romero drove to an iron gate that had fancy grillwork. He honked three times rapidly, waited, then honked twice slowly, waited, then honked five times rapidly. The gate opened. No person arrived to open it; evidently it was done by electronic remote control.

After the Mercedes passed the gate and started down a red brick driveway Douglas could see the entire house. A white, palatial Moorish structure of two stories, it had tall porch columns and metal outside balconies. The fiercely green hill

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behind it made the house appear especially beautiful.

"Nice house," said Douglas. "Does Wade own it?"

"A company headquartered in the Bahamas owns it. Señor Wade merely rents it from the company."

"And does Señor Wade own the company?"

Romero smiled. He looked ahead at the driveway instead of at Douglas. *"Esa,"* he said, *"es una cuestión aparte."*

Now it was Douglas who smiled. "I thought it might be."

Douglas tried to act confident, act like he was an old pro at meeting criminal masterminds, but it was only an act. He was worried. Not scared really, but worried.

Romero pulled up in front of the mansion and killed the motor. He nodded to Douglas, then opened the door. Douglas opened his own door and slid out of the car. After the air-conditioned interior of the Mercedes it was like stepping into a furnace.

"Sígame," said Romero.

Douglas followed him up the tall, stone steps to the porch of the mansion. The porch was stone. Romero led him into the house through tall butterfly doors that swung inward.

Douglas was surprised by the interior of the house. It was as large and spacious as he had suspected, but almost bare of furnishings. There were only a few chairs and tables, none special, merely the sort that could be bought at any furniture store in Europe. The walls had no tapestries or paintings. They were marble, as was the floor. The ceiling had a blue and yellow Turkish pattern.

Eventually they emerged at the rear of the house. They were on a large terrace that overlooked a rich green lawn and three or four dozen eucalyptus trees. The terrace was stone. At the far end of it, shaded by a potted palm tree, was a table, several metal folding chairs, and a man seated in one of the chairs.

"Wait here," said Romero.

Douglas stopped while Romero continued to walk toward the man.

The man was reading a newspaper. He was light-complexioned, about five ten, of medium weight, and rather handsome. He had soft but regular features. Douglas was too far away to see the color of his eyes, but he could see that the man's nose was thin and sharply faceted and that his brown hair would have been a normal length during the fifties but would now be considered short. All of his clothes—his light dress jacket, his shirt, his pants, and his shoes—were white.

Romero walked up to the man, stopped, stood without speaking. He stood there for a

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minute. Then the man in the white suit lowered his newspaper and Romero said something to him. The man looked in Douglas's direction, then nodded to Romero.

Romero returned to Douglas. "Señor Wade will see you now," he said.

"Gracias," said Douglas. He began walking toward the man in white.

So this was Winthrop Wade, thought Douglas. He remembered what Teppinlow had told him about Wade. A mysterious man was this Wade, a man rarely seen although the subject of considerable newspaper and magazine speculation. Wade was rumored to be the head of a massive criminal organization that had tentacles throughout Europe and South America, branches in southern Africa and Southeast Asia. He'd been investigated by a half dozen governments, but nothing had ever been proved against him. Wade himself was known to frequent the major resorts, where his reputation attracted celebrities, nobles, and jet setters to his side. He was an "in" criminal, in the same manner a smooth gangster or a sophisticated jewel thief was "in." Douglas couldn't understand the type of mentality that idealized gangsters, although he thought he could understand the idealization of jewel thieves. Jewel thieves, he felt, appealed to the rebel in people, perhaps also to the love of boldness and of mystery. He believed that it was the mystery of Wade that attracted the Beautiful People to him. And Wade was certainly mysterious: no one even knew his nationality.

Douglas reached the table. "Winthrop Wade?"

"Have a seat, Mr. Douglas."

Douglas pulled back one of the metal folding chairs and sat down. He was facing the spectacular view of the eucalyptus trees and green lawn and tall green hill. There was no smog near the hill, only pale blue sky. Winthrop Wade was seated to his right. On the table were several newspapers, a half empty glass of iced tea, and an empty plate. The newspapers weren't Spanish. Douglas recognized two: *Le Monde* of Paris and *La Stampa* of Turin.

"Would you like something to eat?" asked Wade.

"No, thanks."

"Drink?"

"Uhhh—no."

"Just as you please." Wade lifted his own glass of iced tea. "I understand that you're a representative of John Alston Teppinlow IV of Great Neck, Long Island, and that you're here about a painting that was stolen from the Teppinlow collection last month: the *Tower of Milan.*"

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"Yes. The *Tower of Milan* was Mr. Teppinlow's favorite painting. He's desperate to retrieve it."

Wade smiled. "You're a poor negotiator. That sort of talk will drive up my price."

"Then you do have the painting?"

Wade didn't answer. He drank a little more of the tea. Then he placed the glass on the table top. "Do you understand my conditions?" he asked. "If I turn over the painting, there are to be no questions asked and no police reports. Mr. Teppinlow may, if he wishes, report that the painting has been recovered, but under no circumstances is he to say that I returned it to him."

"I can assure you that if you return the *Tower of Milan* your name will never be mentioned."

Wade stared at the hill to his right. "I do not expect that much," he said. "Mr. Teppinlow may say that 'the painting was recovered with the help of Winthrop Wade.' He may say that. But nothing more."

"Very well."

"Then as Mr. Teppinlow's agent you do agree to these conditions?"

"Yes. And you have the painting?"

Wade looked at Douglas. "The painting," he said, "will be yours again after you've transferred to my Zurich account the sum of one million dollars in American money. Is that satisfactory?"

"One million?"

"One million."

Douglas hesitated. One million was the top price authorized by Teppinlow for the recovery of the painting.

"I can offer you seven hundred thousand for it. That was the price Mr. Teppinlow paid nine years ago when he bought it."

"One million is my price. Take it or leave it. I'll not meet with you or any other representative of John Teppinlow again."

Douglas sighed, looked away from Wade, looked at the very green hill. The Mediterranean was behind that hill but he could not see it. "All right," he said. "One million dollars."

Wade reached into an inside pocket of his white jacket and extracted a folded paper. "This is the name of my bank in Zurich," he said. "Wire the money to my account before eleven tomorrow morning."

"When will we receive the painting?"

"I'll meet you at noon tomorrow in front of a warehouse near the waterfront. I'll telephone later to tell you the address. Come alone."

"You'll bring the painting?"

"Yes."

"How do we know that once we've wired the money to your

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account you'll keep your side of the bargain?"

Wade reached into his jacket again. Momentarily Douglas feared that he was drawing a pistol, but instead he brought out a pack of Camels and a gold cigarette lighter. He withdrew a cigarette from the pack, placed it between his lips, and lit it. "I always keep my bargains," said Wade. "Always."

Douglas had heard that, too. That was one of the things people found redeeming about Winthrop Wade: he was a criminal who never lied.

"Do we have a bargain, Mr. Douglas?" Wade looked at the hill again and drew upon his cigarette.

"Yes," said Douglas, "we do."

"Good. Carlos will drive you back to your hotel."

The telephone in Colin Douglas's room rang shortly before eleven the following morning. Douglas had been lying on the bed, listening to FM music from the radio console. The air conditioner was on, the room cool and pleasant.

He slid off the bed and sat on the chair at the desk where the phone rested. The call was from New York City. John Alston Teppinlow IV.

"Everything's been taken care of," said Teppinlow. "I've transferred the money to the bastard's Zurich account just like he asked."

"Sorry I couldn't get him to lower his price, sir."

"Not your fault, I suppose. The *Tower of Milan* is worth a million. I doubt that Wade could've gotten that much for it on the black market, but you never know. An Arab oil sheik or a cattle tycoon in Brazil . . . Well, anyway, we're getting it back and that's the important thing."

"You're sure that Wade can be trusted to deliver?"

"Yes. I've had our detective agency investigate the fellow thoroughly. He's apparently the kingpin of an international crime organization—nobody has proved it, though—but he does keep his word. Strange."

"Yes, very."

"Well, the rest is up to you, Colin. Get the painting back. Ship it to the States as soon as possible. But I want you to go to London first and have Christie's or some other organization that regularly handles and ships valuable paintings crate it properly."

"Right."

"Thanks, Colin. Knew I could count on you."

"Thank you, Mr. Teppinlow."

Douglas replaced the receiver. He wondered if he'd receive a bonus or raise after he recovered the painting. This sort of work was certainly above

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and beyond the call of duty.

The phone rang again. When Douglas answered, the hotel operator informed him that he had another call—local this time.

"Colin Douglas?"

"Yes."

"Wade here. Be in front of the offices of Girona y Hijo at noon. It's near the waterfront. Come alone. Got it?"

"Got it."

The connection ended. Douglas hung up, rose from the chair, and walked to the closet. He put on a light tan jacket. He would've preferred to go out in his shirtsleeves, but Teppinlow insisted that his employees always wear at least a jacket over their shirts. He was old fashioned that way. Although Douglas thought that meeting with a criminal at high noon in a sweltering, smoggy city on the Spanish coast would qualify as an exception, he believed that rules were made to be followed, that once you started breaking them it was impossible to stop.

He hurried down to the lobby. He grabbed a light breakfast and cup of coffee at the Restaurant Chez Diplomatique, then went out to catch a cab. There were several out front. He took the closest that had its flag down.

The trip to the waterfront didn't take long. Soon the cab pulled to the curb in front of a large, white, two story building so close to the street that the sidewalk was only two feet wide. A faded brown sign, about one yard square, had been placed beside the door. Black letters on the sign identified the business occupying the premises as Girona y Hijo, exporters of citrus fruits. Douglas glanced at his wristwatch: eleven fifty-six. Again, no time left to argue with the cab driver about the fare. It didn't matter. This driver quoted him the honest fare. Douglas added a twenty percent tip.

"Gracias," said the driver. He drove away.

Douglas waited on the narrow, cracked sidewalk, and leaned against the Girona y Hijo building to be in the shade. Standing in the shade didn't protect him from the hot, humid air. He could feel sweat under his armpits and chin. He could feel it in his hair and he wished he'd gotten a haircut before he left the States. In this heavy, hot air he wished, too, that he had a cold drink. Not beer or soda pop. Nice, cold mountain water fresh from a sparkling stream, brought to his mouth, his tongue, by his own cupped hands.

While he stood there, waiting for Wade and thinking about the heat, he looked around. Most of the buildings were white

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and close to the street. Most had two stories, although a few had only one. A single building was made of wood. The others were made of earth, their rough whiteness stark under the Spanish sun. The street was dirty, cracked, old. There were two automobiles parked in the distance, both of them small and European. Douglas couldn't see what model cars they were. He believed one was a Fiat. Both were empty. No one was on the streets or the sidewalks. He could see, two blocks down, a couple of men who walked in and out of a white two story building three or four times. They seemed to be interested in the telephone pole in front of the building. Douglas guessed that they were phone repairmen.

Douglas pulled the handkerchief from his pants pocket and wiped his face. His face was covered by perspiration. Soon his handkerchief was soaked with it.

He checked his wristwatch: nine minutes past twelve. Wade was late. Maybe he planned to be. Maybe he was watching from a nearby building, making sure that Douglas had come alone. No, the head of an international crime organization would have somebody else watching. Somebody in radio contact with Wade.

After a long while Douglas heard a motor. Not a car motor. A loud, roaring motor, like a semi's back home. And that's what it was. A modern, sleek semi turned the corner one building down from Girona y Hijo, moving toward Douglas. The ground shook when it passed him. The truck created a hot, heavy wind. Although the wind passed in several seconds it left Douglas even more hot than he'd been before. He took out his handkerchief again and wiped his neck and ears. He watched the semi. It stopped a block down the street. A garage-like door in front of one of the two story white buildings folded up; men in jeans and T-shirts came out; they moved a mobile loading platform to the back of the trailer; and then they and the two men who'd been in the truck's cab began unloading crates from the trailer and taking them inside the building. Douglas watched them. Occasionally one or another of the men glanced in his direction. Douglas felt relieved that he didn't have to do that sort of heavy work during such a miserable afternoon. But he also felt guilty because they were working and he wasn't.

Eventually the men from the truck closed the trailer's butterfly doors and returned to the cab. The truck's motor roared loudly several times (the driver was probably flooring the ac-

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celerator) and black diesel smoke shot from the exhaust pipe up through the air. The smoke looked blurred to Douglas because of heat waves. The truck began to move. The men in T-shirts went back into the white building and pulled down the wooden folding door behind them. Douglas watched the door descend, then he watched the semi. It continued down the street for three blocks, turned a corner and vanished. He thought it odd that a semi had delivered freight this late in the day. When the truck was being unloaded, it blocked half the street. He wondered if the drivers ever unhitched their trailers and left them in front of buildings the way they did in America.

After a while he looked at his wristwatch: one-oh-seven.

Wade was more than an hour late. Douglas suspected that Teppinlow was being doublecrossed.

Well, he thought, so much for Winthrop Wade's sterling reputation. What would happen now? What recourse did Teppinlow have against Wade? None that Douglas could think of. What if Teppinlow went public, told the press about the deal he'd made with Wade and how Wade had doublecrossed him? What would Wade do? Deny the whole thing? Maybe he'd say that he'd delivered the painting as he'd promised, that if anyone cheated John Alston Teppinlow it was Colin Douglas. Douglas thought about that. He got scared. Everybody talked about how good Wade's word was, so if Wade said that Douglas had pulled the doublecross . . . He didn't even want to consider that possibility. But he did—for a long time.

The door that led into the building Douglas was leaning against—the door next to the Girona y Hijo sign—opened. A short, rather heavy-set man with a bald head and black mustache and wearing a pinstriped shirt with brown bow tie stepped out onto the sidewalk.

"Dispense usted," he said. "Do you want something here?"

"No. I'm waiting for someone."

"Oh."

"I'm sorry if I'm bothering you. The man I've been waiting for was supposed to arrive at noon."

The bald man glanced at his wristwatch, then half-smiled at Douglas. "It's all right," he said, but his eyes were still questioning. "No bother. We were just wondering why you were out here."

The man stepped back into the building. The door closed. Douglas was again alone on the sidewalk.

He glanced at his own wrist-

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watch: one twenty-four.

He decided that he'd wait until one thirty. If Wade hadn't arrived by that time, he would return to the hotel and phone Teppinlow to tell him the bad news. He hoped that Teppinlow would believe him if Wade lied. After all, he'd worked for Teppinlow ever since he'd graduated from Harvard Business. He'd been twenty-four then, he was thirty-four now, so it had been exactly ten years. Ten years. He'd never failed Teppinlow during those years. Still, he'd never become close to him, either. But nobody did become close to J.A. Teppinlow IV, at least nobody who worked for him. And after a decade of loyal service his word should carry some weight.

Douglas remained until one thirty. Then he turned and entered the Girona y Hijo building. He 'd expected it to be cool, air-conditioned, but the heat was as oppressive as it had been outside. Three electric fans inside the big front room gave little relief to the dozen male workers seated behind the heavy wooden desks there.

Douglas spotted the man he'd talked with outside. He approached him. Everyone had stopped work to watch Douglas.

"Excuse me," he said to the man, "but it appears that the person I was supposed to meet here isn't going to show. Would you mind if I used your telephone to call a cab? I would walk down the street to look for a pay phone but in this heat—"

The man smiled and held up his right hand in a "stop" motion., "I'll phone for one," he said.

"Gracias. . . . Muchas gracias."

Douglas hoped that they would invite him to remain inside where the fans were going, but they didn't. He walked back outside and waited on the narrow sidewalk for the cab. He wondered if he was doing the right thing, leaving. He had waited for Wade a long time . . . especially considering the heat.

The cab arrived fifteen minutes later. Its driver shook his head when he saw Douglas. Douglas looked down at himself: the underarms of his tan jacket as well as the front of his shirt and the upper regions of his pants legs were soaked. He hadn't realized how heavily he'd been sweating until then. He smiled at the driver and shrugged his shoulders. He climbed into the cab. Its windows were down, but it was hot inside anyway.

When they reached the hotel this man charged him the same fare as the previous driver had. Douglas tipped him fifty percent. He was that glad to be back where air conditioners

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were operating.

Before he went to the desk Douglas went into the restaurant for a glass of ice water. He ordered three, one after another, and downed the water in gulps. He could hardly breathe. He tipped the waitress big.

When he went to the desk, the clerk told him that a message had arrived for him while he was out. Douglas thought that it was from Teppinlow until he read it. The message stated that he should call a certain local number immediately upon his return.

Douglas went to the lobby phone to make the call. He hoped that the message had come from Winthrop Wade, allowed himself to hope too that there had been no doublecross. Maybe an emergency had prevented Wade from keeping the appointment. Yes, it had to be Wade. Who else but Wade would be calling him from within Barcelona?

He dialed the number.

"Sí?"

"This is Colin Douglas. I was instructed to call this number."

"Colin Douglas?"

"Yes. . . . *Sí.*"

"Uno momento."

A minute passed, then another man's voice came through the earphone. "Señor Douglas?"

"Yes."

"This is Carlos Romero. I will be at your hotel in fifteen or twenty minutes. Please wait for me in your room. What is your room number?"

Douglas told him, then Romero hung up.

Douglas took the elevator up to his floor, went to his room and waited. He didn't turn on the television set or radio console. He just stretched out on the bed, hoping to cool down. The room's air conditioner and the water he'd consumed at the hotel restaurant helped, but he was still hot and thirsty.

He thought about the phone conversation—if those few words qualified as "conversation." He wished he'd had a chance to ask Romero why Wade hadn't kept the appointment. But he would learn soon. Romero would explain. Wade must have been detained by other business.

A half hour later there was a knock on his door. Douglas rose, walked over, and looked through the peephole. He could see Carlos Romero in the hallway.

Douglas opened the door. Romero hurried inside. He looked nervous. Douglas glanced up and down the hallway, but no one else was there. He shut the door and turned to face Romero.

"Where's Wade?" he asked.

"Fué atropellado por un coche."

"When?"

"Eleven thirty this morning,"

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said Romero. "He had just finished a business meeting at a building on the Avenue de Sarriá. His car was in a parking lot across the street. When he stepped into the crosswalk, a car that had been parked a half block away suddenly sped out. It hit him before he could escape."

"Then it wasn't an accident?"

"No. Murder, señor."

"Then he's—he's dead?"

"*Sí.*"

That explained a lot. In fact, it explained everything. Wade hadn't surrendered the painting because Wade never had a chance to. While Douglas had waited for him, the man in white had been on his way to the morgue.

At least Douglas was clear with Teppinlow. He could call him, explain what had happened. Teppinlow wouldn't have reason to doubt him.

But what about the million dollars? And the painting?

"Do you know about my business with Winthrop Wade?" he asked Romero.

"No."

"It involved a painting. Do you know about a painting?"

Romero shook his head.

"I paid for a painting," Douglas explained. "Señor Wade was going to deliver it to me at noon today."

"I knew that you were supposed to meet him, that he was supposed to give something to you. That was why I called you: to tell you why the Señor Wade could not keep the rendezvous."

"Does *anybody* know about my transaction with Wade?"

"*Sí.* Aranas."

"Who is Aranas?" asked Douglas.

"He is—was—the Señor Wade's right-hand man. He is Corsican."

"Corsican? Did Wade have ties to the Union?"

"The Union?"

"The Union Corse. The Corsican crime syndicate."

Romero shook his head. "Paolo Aranas is an honest man. Not all Corsicans are gangsters.Nor all Sicilians. Not all Americans are millionaires. Same thing."

"Yes, sorry. But this fellow Aranas knew about my deal with Wade?"

"*Sí.* When I phoned to tell him about Señor Wade, he asked if Señor Wade had made the delivery to you. I said that I didn't think so, that Señor Wade had planned to meet you at noon. Señor Aranas told me to contact you and tell you that he would meet you tonight."

"Will he surrender the painting to me?"

"I don't know, señor."

"Where will he meet me?"

Romero told him the name of a nightclub and gave him a slip of paper with its name and ad-

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dress written upon it. He told him to meet Aranas at nine o'clock.

Romero turned to leave:

"Sorry about Wade," said Douglas. He said it to be polite. Actually he didn't care about Wade as long as he recovered Teppinlow's painting. One gangster more or less wouldn't matter much to the world.

"*Sí,*" said Romero, turning again in order to face Douglas. "It was a shock. I don't know who would do such a terrible thing."

"Surely Winthrop Wade had many enemies—most of them in the underworld."

Romero looked annoyed. He started to say something, hesitated, and then said, "I think Señor Aranas might explain about Señor Wade this evening."

"Explain what?"

"I'm not sure that he will want to. I think that he may, though. And it is not my place to tell you about the Señor Wade."

"But you don't know if he'll have the painting?"

"I know nothing of any painting, Señor Douglas. . . . I must go now."

Romero left.

Douglas immediately phoned Teppinlow to report all that had happened.

After listening silently to Douglas relate the afternoon's events, Teppinlow asked: "What can this man Aranas 'explain' about Wade?"

"I don't know."

"Well, just so he can explain about the painting—or about my million dollars that's in the late Mr. Wade's bank."

"If Aranas is now the head of the Wade syndicate, he is morally obligated to respect the deal that we made with Wade."

"Don't tell me. Tell Aranas!"

"If he doesn't carry out the bargain—"

"If he doesn't carry out the bargain," interrupted Teppinlow, "contact the authorities. My painting was stolen in the United States and that's out of their jurisdiction, but the loss of my million dollars occurred because of a bargain struck in Barcelona. If this fellow Aranas doesn't deliver the painting—or the money—call the police."

The meeting place chosen by Aranas was the Bocaccio, on Muntaner, as elegant a night spot as Douglas had seen in New York or anywhere else. The decor was red, the art decorations modernistic. He liked the place. Everything except the number of people present. There were too many for him even to guess which person might be Aranas.

He asked to be shown to a table for two. Then he waited, watching the dancing and the

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pretty women in their stylish clothes. He assumed that Aranas would know him or would be accompanied by Romero.

Periodically he checked his wristwatch: nine-oh-five, nine-oh-seven, nine twelve, nine seventeen.

Maybe a rival gangster had killed Aranas as well as Wade. He doubted it. The odds against both a gangland boss and his top lieutenant's being murdered the same day were probably astronomical. While he wondered what was delaying Aranas he continued to watch the women and the dancing and listen to the music. He'd been nervous when he'd entered; gradually he relaxed. He relaxed so much that he momentarily forgot why he was in the Bocaccio and caught himself hoping that one of the prettier women would approach him so he could ask for a dance. Then he remembered.

"Señor Colin Douglas?"

Douglas looked up at the man who was standing beside his table. He'd not seen or heard him approach. The man was tall, somewhat thin, deeply tanned, had thick black hair although he had to be at least fifty, thick black eyebrows, a long, thin nose, few wrinkles, deep dimples, and that confident, relaxed expression usually worn by the athletically supreme or by people with great amounts of very old money. He was dressed in a slick blue suit, red tie, and white shirt—all expensive-looking.

"You are Douglas?"

"Yes, yes. Sorry, I—are you . . . ?"

"Paolo Aranas."

Douglas half-stood. "Have a seat, Mr. Aranas."

"Thank you." Aranas sat down opposite Douglas. He rested his hands on the table. His fingers sparkled from the diamond rings upon them. Douglas remembered how some American gangsters were equally gaudy in their dress.

"I understand that you were an associate of Mr. Wade's," said Douglas.

"That's correct."

"Also that you were aware that he had agreed to deliver a painting called the *Tower of Milan* to me. And that we had already paid him for it."

"I'm aware of that."

"Then you're also aware of my predicament."

Aranas smiled. "Yes. You've paid the money into his bank. You cannot recover the money. Because he's dead, he cannot deliver the painting."

"Precisely."

Aranas reached into his jacket. He extracted a cigarette case. It was gold, studded with diamonds, and had the initials "PFA" engraved in silver upon the lid. He offered a cigarette

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to Douglas, and after Douglas refused put one between his own lips. He replaced the case, then pulled out a silver lighter and lit the cigarette. He made these movements with sleek, smooth elegance. Douglas believed that he'd had a lot of practice lighting his cigarette in just that way.

"Winthrop had intended to deliver the painting to you," said Aranas. "Do you understand that? Had he not been killed, he would've met you as he planned."

"I understand."

"*Se le condenó a muerte* is what the police said. They think it was a contract. I think it was political."

"I didn't know that Winthrop Wade was involved in politics."

"He wasn't. But he'd spread the word that he was in Spain on this occasion to conclude some sort of arms deal. He didn't hint at whom the deal was with. Probably half the governments and revolutionaries in Europe thought that his customer was their own special enemy."

"Who *was* he supplying?"

Aranas smiled, then drew deeply upon his cigarette. A young woman with jet black hair walked past the table. Douglas saw Aranas follow her legs with his eyes.

Aranas looked back at Douglas. "I have Winthrop's account number. It wasn't his regular one. It's an emergency account . . . maybe 'emergency' isn't the right word . . . a current account—for business transactions in process."

"I understand. So you do have access to the million that we paid Wade?"

Aranas nodded.

"And you'll return it?"

"Wouldn't you prefer to receive the painting?"

"Yes. Can you deliver it?"

Aranas nodded, then drew upon his cigarette.

"When?"

"Would tomorrow morning be too late?"

"Tomorrow morning would be fine."

"Then I'll have it delivered to you at your room tomorrow morning at eight o'clock."

"My room?" said Douglas. "Aren't you afraid I might set a trap?"

"Winthrop purchased the *Tower of Milan* with funds from a certain company in which I own stock. Now he's dead. I know that the painting was stolen. I'm simply returning it to its rightful owner. As for the money paid into the Swiss account—well, you can't prove that I have access to it."

"I guess not."

"And you would find it difficult to press charges against me, Mr. Douglas. If you'll excuse a bit of boasting, I'm an

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influential man—including with the police."

"Figures. But I wasn't actually thinking about trapping you. I was merely curious about why you would take the chance."

"Good." Aranas drew upon his cigarette. He turned and looked at the dancers, then faced Douglas again.

"You said that Wade bought the painting?" asked Douglas.

"Yes. For a million dollars."

"But—now wait a minute. That's impossible. We paid him a million. If he paid a million he didn't make a profit. And we also thought that he was the man who masterminded the theft."

"He bought it from the thieves for one million dollars. Then he contacted your Mr. Teppinlow to see if he wanted it back. When Teppinlow agreed to ransom the painting, Winthrop told him to send someone to Barcelona to negotiate a price. Actually there was never to be a negotiation. The price was one million dollars. No more, no less."

Colin Douglas couldn't figure out where Wade's profit was. But he knew that some apparently unprofitable ventures often had tremendous profits hidden within them.

A waiter arrived and told Aranas that there was a phone call for him. The waiter behaved as though he knew him. It occurred to Douglas only then that Aranas might be a regular customer of the Bocaccio.

Aranas was gone five minutes. Douglas spent that time watching the dancing and the young women and examining the pattern of the bamboo lamp.

When Aranas returned he no longer had his cigarette.

"My apologies for the interruption," he said.

"They appear to know you here. I didn't know that places like this catered to members of . . ."

Aranas's eyes narrowed when Douglas failed to complete the sentence. "Of what?"

"I spoke without thinking."

"Members of what?"

"Organized crime."

To Douglas's surprise (and relief), Aranas laughed. "I'm not a member of organized crime, Mr. Douglas. Carlos told me about how you instantly linked me to the Union Corse when you heard that I was Corsican."

"It was more than your being Corsican; it's also the fact that you were associated with Winthrop Wade. And apparently you're now the new boss of the Wade syndicate."

Aranas laughed again, softly, shaking his head. "Mr. Douglas, I'm a respectable, honest, legitimate businessman. I've never committed a crime in my entire life. If you don't believe

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that, feel free to make inquiries about me to the federal police or to your own FBI."

"Then why were you associated with Wade?"

"I was involved in many business deals with Winthrop. And he was my close and dear friend. He was a fine man, a good citizen of your country, and—"

"Of my country?"

"Yes, he was American. Born in New York, raised at various houses owned by his family in New York, Nassau, and Colorado Springs."

"American," said Douglas. The newspaper articles he'd read for background and the report of the Teppinlow detectives had all said that Wade's nationality and place of birth were unknown. They had said that he spoke fluent English, French, Spanish, and Italian. Several people had reported that he spoke with an American accent (although they disagreed whether it was New York, Southern, Texan, or Californian) while others claimed that his accent was English, Scottish, Irish, Australian, Spanish, French, German, or "Slavic." The detective report also said that one man who'd met Wade twice seven years apart claimed that the man in white spoke with an English accent the first time, a German accent the second. The report's conclusion on this subject was that Wade "may affect accents other than his own, probably to further obscure his origins and background."

"Yes," said Aranas, "American. Most of my business ventures with Winthrop involved the United States. Some were in Argentina, Brazil, or Mexico, but most involved the United States."

"I'm afraid I don't understand."

"Have you ever heard of Knopes & Randall?"

"Of course. It used to be a shipping company back in the days of the clippers. Later branched out into railroads, then airplanes, land development, high tech electronics—well, just about everything. A conglomerate."

"Correct, Mr. Douglas. If you know the history of Knopes & Randall you know that the Randall heirs bought out the Knopes heirs, and then some of the Randall heirs bought out other Randall heirs, until at last the company's ownership rested in the hands of the grandchildren of Cyrus Winthrop Randall, Jr. One of the grandchildren was Cyrus Winthrop Awlingsworth. He dropped his first name early—as many people do—and changed his last name (although never legally) in order that his relatives and friends wouldn't be embarrassed by his activities."

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"Winthrop Wade."

"One of America's richest men. And I assure you that all of my ventures with Winthrop were strictly honest and legitimate."

For a moment Douglas said nothing. It took time for him to digest the fact that one of the principal heirs of the Knopes & Randall fortune was Winthrop Wade, the man in white, international outlaw chief, hero of the jet set, and murder victim of earlier today.

"I'm more confused than ever," he said at last.

Now it was Aranas who said nothing. He stared at Douglas in silence for more than a minute. Almost two minutes. Douglas believed that Aranas's eyes were appraising him, sizing him up.

"I'll make a deal with you," said Aranas at last. "I'll tell you the secret of Winthrop Wade if you'll promise never to reveal it. Not to anyone. Not to the press, not to the authorities, not to your employer, not to your family. To no one."

"What secret?"

"First you must promise. Winthrop went to a great deal of trouble to cover his tracks. There was always the danger that someone who knew him in college or somewhere else would recognize him, talk to the press. I shouldn't tell you, but I believe that you have a right to know. You are here at the end, so to speak."

Douglas looked into Aranas's face—an aristocratic face, he thought now—and hesitated. He wanted to know about Wade. Aranas had aroused his interest with what he had revealed, but Douglas hated secrets. He had enough trouble guarding Teppinlow's secrets. He loved to hear them but hated to keep them. He wanted to tell people what he knew. Shout it, for all the world to hear. For all the world to know that Colin Douglas was more than just another cipher in the Teppinlow organization. He wanted to do that, but he never did. He kept the secrets and he kept them well.

"No," said Douglas, "I don't want to know."

Aranas looked surprised. But he nodded slightly.

But Douglas did want to know. He wanted to know why a rich member of one of the most important families in New York had died in Spain as the leader of an international crime gang.

"I mean," said Douglas, "yes."

Aranas raised one eyebrow without raising the other. Douglas wished he could do that. "Are you sure this time?"

"Yes—yes, I'm sure. I want to know about Wade."

Aranas nodded. "Then I shall tell you about him," he said. "Winthrop Wade's so-called

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criminal activities were the same as the deal he made with you. He'd buy something from a thief, then sell it back to its rightful owner for the same price he'd paid. That was the only substance to the charges of criminal activities. The rest—the gunrunning, the narcotics smuggling, the hijackings, the murders—all the rest was an invention."

"But—but why?"

Aranas shrugged his shoulders. "I'm not sure—exactly. I think that he simply wanted to be a criminal mastermind without engaging in crimes. He wanted to live the image rather than the reality. The whole business of the white clothes and the black limousines—everything—was staged. Everything was as you would see it in the movies. He played the *role* of a criminal mastermind. And I suppose that's what Winthrop really was: an actor. An actor who played only one role."

"But all the crimes he—"

"He never committed any crimes. That's why the authorities could never prove anything against him: there was nothing to prove. He just created the appearance of crimes . . . spread rumors . . . leaked stories to the press. He was actually helping crime victims, after a fashion, by recovering stolen property. He did that for Teppinlow."

"For one million dollars," Douglas pointed out.

"That was the price Wade himself had paid. You see, he was unwilling to take a loss in his game. But if the painting hadn't been worth the million to Teppinlow, Teppinlow would have kept the money. So the painting meant more to your employer than the money did and it was Wade who retrieved the painting for him."

"Wade must have been crazy."

"No crazier than urban cowboys in both your country and mine. No crazier than many people who are constructing their lives around motion picture images. Winthrop simply had more money to spend on his fantasy." Aranas laughed. "Winthrop sold his Knopes & Randall stock years ago. When he reinvested the money, he paid cash for everything. That caused the authorities to believe that he was using his illegitimate income to buy legitimate businesses. Actually he was using his legitimate money to promote an image of illegitimacy."

"Everything—an act."

"Everything an act."

Aranas told him more, additional details about what he'd already revealed. The basic fact remained: Winthrop Wade wasn't a criminal, but an honest man who pretended to be a

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criminal because he thought that sophisticated international crooks were fascinating people. His attraction to that life had been the same as the attraction to him of the jet setters and the celebrities and the others who'd sought to be seen in his presence. People had believed his act.

Someone had believed it enough to murder him.

After finishing his explanation, Aranas left the table and strolled toward the dancers.

Colin Douglas left the Bocaccio. He planned to return to the hotel, where he would phone Teppinlow with the news that the *Tower of Milan* would be returned tomorrow morning. He wouldn't tell him about Winthrop Wade. He would keep his promise to Aranas.

When Douglas stepped out onto the sidewalk he was greeted by a loud, rolling roar. For a moment he didn't know what the sound was. Then he realized that it was thunder. He paused on the sidewalk to stare at the night sky. The sky was a sheet of black. No stars, no moon.

Suddenly lightning flashed. The flash was very high up and moved from horizon to horizon instead of from sky to ground. Seconds later came the thunder.

The air was still hot. Still humid. The type of hot, moist air that caused Douglas's clothes to stick against his skin. The night had not changed that, and neither had the storm. He hoped that the storm would cool things down. He didn't think that it would. There was only the lightning and the thunder. There was no rain.

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OFF THE RECORD

PLUS EXPENSES: THE PRIVATE EYE AS GREAT AMERICAN HERO

by Loren D. Estleman



"I'm a very smart guy. I haven't a feeling or a scruple in the world. All I have the itch for is money. I am so money greedy that for twenty-five bucks a day and expenses, mostly gasoline and whiskey, I do my thinking myself, what there is of it. . . . I dodge bullets and eat saps, and say thank you very much, if you have any more trouble, I hope you'll think of me, I'll just leave one of my cards in case anything comes up. I do all this for twenty-five bucks a day . . ." —Raymond Chandler, *The Big Sleep*.

His tools are the gun in the shoulder holster, the wisecrack, the bottle in the desk drawer. Between the time he is first encountered—usually in his seedy office on the wrong side of the high-rent district—and when he is left alone at the end of the case, he will have stumbled across at least one body, been drugged, beaten, knocked unconscious, and propositioned, finally triumphing in a Shakespearean last act in which, bruised but unbowed, he glibly explains where all the crooked streets and blind alleys have led him, just before the guns roar. Fade out on a tired man in a rumpled trenchcoat standing on a wet street corner, striking a match on his thumbnail. Alone, always alone.

We don't just think about the image; we suck on it. It's as American as Kentucky rye and as far off the mark as it is dead on. Because what we are and what we would like to be amount to the same thing. We even have a name for the fantasy.

Loren D. Estleman is the author of fourteen books, six of them mysteries. Most recent in his series of private eye novels starring P.I. Amos Walker is The Midnight Man *(Houghton Mifflin). He has also written mystery short stories and novels set in the American West.*

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We call it hardboiled.

The hardboiled private eye could not exist but for Buffalo Bill and the dime novels written about him by Ned Buntline after the Civil War. In them, and in the hundreds of imitations that sprang up in the years following, the myth of the lone hero who hurls himself against staggering odds for an ideal received its first mass-market acceptance. This cheap form of entertainment would know no close competitor until the even cheaper pulp fiction magazines appeared just after the turn of the twentieth century.

Pulp detective hero Nick Carter boasted many of the qualities attributed to the dime-novel cowboy—brave, truthful, respectful of women, he never swore or drank hard liquor, and entertained no vices beyond an occasional mug of beer and a cigar in the privacy of his study. But since he was fictional, he was not grounded to reality, and his exploits outshone the most wildly exaggerated stories about Wyatt Earp and Wild Bill Hickok. His adventures numbered in the thousands, written by a variety of authors under the trade name "Nicholas Carter," although Frederick Van Rensselaer Dey was most often responsible. The day of the lone detective had dawned. It fell to Carroll John Daly to give him his unique stamp.

> "I just wanted to make sure that both your hands were occupied and that you were Race Williams. So—take that!"
>
> His right hand, that was under his jacket, flashed into view. For a moment the hard square surface of a black automatic showed; jerked up so that I looked right down the blue barrel of a German Luger.
>
> Hard, red knuckles tightened and showed white. And—and I shot him five times. Five times smack in the stomach, before he could ever squeeze that trigger.

This passage, from Daly's 1935 novel *Murder from the East,* is typical of the stories featuring private eye Race Williams after his debut in the June, 1923, issue of *Black Mask.* In his tough-talking killer with a code, Daly established a pattern that remained constant in the genre, but few of its heroes were as bloodthirsty. Williams's twin .44's and his readiness to use them linked him to the Old West, and may explain why the appearance in *Black Mask* of a new Race Williams story would increase sales twenty percent. But this was Prohibition, and his targets were more likely to be gangsters and

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crooked officials than Indians and stage robbers.

For a killer he could be incredibly naive, especially concerning women. He was constantly walking into traps laid by scheming females, chief among them Florence Drummond, a kind of sex-changed Professor Moriarty, also called The Flame—thus creating another of the form's trademarks, the dangerous doll.

Nor was he above some Nick Carter-style moralizing. " 'Private Detective' best describes me to the ignorant and those who have not had use for such animals," he says in a 1929 story. "The words themselves are not so bad but I don't like the music that most detective agencies set these words to. There are honest private detectives, of course—but there are honest politicians, too. Get the point?"

The last statement removes Race Williams from the company of his predecessors and places him permanently in the same seminal position occupied by Shakespeare's Hamlet. Never before had the subject of corruption been treated so casually. The form was exploring forbidden territory, and as the lines between the world and the underworld blurred, a gray area opened up that would become the domain of the detective as hero.

An admirer of the stark early writing style of Ernest Hemingway, Dashiell Hammett left the Pinkerton Detective Agency to apply that style to crime fiction. His first sleuth, and the one he wrote about most, was a nameless operative for the Continental Detective Agency. On the surface, the Continental Op seems the antithesis of the quixotic shamuses to follow: short, overweight, and middle-aged, he claims not to care one way or the other about his clients' characters so long as he is paid. But his conscience finally boils over near the end of *Red Harvest,* his first full-length adventure, in 1929:

> "This damned burg's getting me. If I don't get away soon I'll be going blood-simple like the natives. . . . I've got hard skin all over what's left of my soul, and after twenty years of messing around with crime I can look at any sort of murder without seeing anything in it but my bread and butter, the day's work. But this getting a rear out of planning deaths is not natural to me. It's what this place has done to me."

Other elements are developing as well. The misogyny that is whimsical in Daly's Race Williams takes a sudden, vi-

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cious turn in Hammett's Op. "There are many, many murders with never a woman in them anywhere," he muses early in his career, "but seldom a very conspicuous killing." In *The Dain Curse,* Alice Leggett boasts about how she planned the murder of her late husband's first wife, using the victim's own daughter, Gabrielle:

> "I . . . taught Gabrielle an amusing little game. I would lie on Lily's bed, pretending to sleep. The child would push a chair to the chiffonier, climb up on it, take the pistol from the drawer, creep over to the bed, put the muzzle of the pistol to my head, and press the trigger. . . . I would reward her with candy, cautioning her against saying anything about the game to her mother or to anyone else, as we were going to surprise her mother with it.
>
> "We did. . . ."

Two pages later, the villainess is dead. "I hope you're satisfied with the way your work got done," another character says to the Op. Replies the detective: "It got done."

Most of Hammett's fame, however, rests on the character of Sam Spade, who appears at book length in *The Maltese Falcon,* and, less effectively, in three short stories. In this cynical loner, the qualities of the typical hardboiled private eye are at last concrete. Though his speech is colloquial, his manners abrasive, and his morals questionable, he does observe a code of sorts, unspoken until the final chapter of *Falcon*:

> " . . . When a man's partner is killed he's supposed to do something about it. It doesn't make any difference what you thought of him. He was your partner and you're supposed to do something about it. . . ."

His hard shell enables him to deal with thieves and killers on their level, but he's sensitive enough to fall in love and to feel pain when the woman he loves is revealed as a murderess. This couldn't happen to Race Williams. On the other hand, Nick Carter would be incapable of saying, while turning her in: "If they hang you I'll always remember you."

Spade's world is a funhouse mirror, where evil is a polite fat man and his effeminate partners, and the dangerous doll is twice deadly for her ability to change colors—whether her name at the moment be Ruth Wonderly or Miss LeBlanc or Brigid O'Shaughnessy. Corruption, the be-all and end-all of *Red Harvest,* is here reduced to a symbol, that of Detective

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Lieutenant Dundy, Spade's adversary throughout the book, with Sergeant Tom Polhaus serving as buffer. With few variations, this pattern would be borrowed by most of Hammett's literary heirs, none with the artistic success of Raymond Chandler.

> It was about eleven o'clock in the morning, mid October, with the sun not shining and a look of hard wet rain in the clearness of the foothills. . . . I was neat, clean, shaved and sober, and I didn't care who knew it. I was everything the well-dressed private detective ought to be. I was calling on four million dollars.

With these words, the public was introduced to Chandler's enigmatic knight errant, Philip Marlowe, in 1939. By the end of *The Big Sleep,* having been beaten, sapped, shot at, and forced to kill his first man, he will have traded this jaunty jingle for a dirge:

> What did it matter where you lay once you were dead? . . . You just slept the big sleep, not caring about the nastiness of how you died or where you fell. Me, I was part of the nastiness now. . . . But the old man didn't have to be. He could lie quiet in his canopied bed, with his bloodless hands folded on the sheet, waiting. His heart was a brief, uncertain murmur. His thoughts were as gray as ashes. And in a little while he too, like Rusty Regan, would be sleeping the big sleep.

Marlowe's humor returns in time to open *Farewell, My Lovely,* but the humor is raspy, more therapy than an attempt to entertain. And by the time he meets a wistfully drunken Terry Lennox on the first page of *The Long Goodbye* thirteen years later, he is no longer capable of cockiness. He's been knocked around too much and peeped behind too many masks and felt in vain for a pulse in too many cold dead throats to raise much more than a tired sneer. But for all that he remains the defender in search of someone to defend, which is both his redemption and his damnation.

The icons with which we have come to associate the private eye—the trenchcoat, the office bottle, the exotic literary imagery ("He wasn't any bigger than a beer truck")—originate with Marlowe. His office, located behind "a reasonably shabby door at the end of a reasonably shabby corridor in the sort of building that was new about the year the all-tile bath-

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room became the basis of civilization," is little more than a place to do his drinking and to be alternately seduced and threatened by clients and tough cops.

Cops are as likely to be his enemies as gangsters and murderesses. The satanic Degarmo of *The Lady in the Lake, Farewell, My Lovely's* lethargic Nulty, the neanderthal Captain Gregorius of *The Long Goodbye* are not the sort a down-at-heels private star can turn to for help. On the other side, he must chart a tricky verbal course between the icy menace of an Eddie Mars and the bullying bigotry of a Mendy Menendez, whose comically circular syntax is as clear as the Queen's English: "I'm a big bad man, Marlowe. I make lots of dough. I got to make lots of dough to juice the guys I got to juice in order to make lots of dough to juice the guys I got to juice."

Trickily realistic dialogue is a Chandler trademark. So is the dangerous doll, dementedly homicidal like Carmen Sternwood in *The Big Sleep* or calculatingly homicidal like Muriel Chess in *The Lady in the Lake* or just plain homicidal like Elizabeth Bright Murdock in *The High Window*. Of the seven novels featuring Philip Marlowe, six present women as chief culprits.

Marlowe's moral code is never spelled out. "He must be," said Chandler in his famous essay "The Simple Art of Murder," "a man of honor—by instinct, by inevitability, without thought of it, and certainly without saying it." To allude to it is to raise doubt. "Tarzan on a big red scooter," sneers Menendez. Clark Brandon, the "reformed" gangster of *Playback,* is more impressed: "I used to know guys like you once. I've lived here so long now I must have forgotten they still make them."

But the knight's Dulcineas continually turn out to be Jezebels, and like all uncompromising idealists, he is doomed to end each crusade as he began it, alone. "The play was over," he says near the close of *The Little Sister*. "I was sitting in the empty theater."

Nine years after Lew Archer first strapped on a shoulder holster in Ross Macdonald's 1949 novel, *The Moving Target,* he and his creator made their major contribution to the form in *The Galton Case*. In this adventure, Archer takes on the family saga as he attempts to trace a lost heir many years after his disappearance. What follows is a journey through the labyrinth of familial ties and childhood trauma that for this detective represent all human development. The circumstances of the present are affected

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by the crimes of the past.

Archer owes a great deal to Philip Marlowe. Both are complex and occasionally incomprehensible characters motivated by the need to be someone's champion. Their insights are similar, and the language they use to express them is nearly identical. Consider this passage from the opening of *The Moving Target*:

> Mrs. Sampson . . . was half lying on a chaise lounge with her back to the late morning sun, a towel draped over her body. There was a wheelchair standing beside her, but she didn't look like an invalid. . . . Her hair was bleached, curled tightly on her narrow head like blobs of whipped cream. Her age was as hard to tell as the age of a figure carved from mahogany.

Now compare it with Chandler's description of General Sternwood at the same point in *The Big Sleep:*

> . . . in the wheelchair an old and obviously dying man watched us come with black eyes from which all fire had died long ago, but which still had the coal-black directness of the eyes in the portrait that hung above the mantel in the hall. . . . The rest of his face was a leaden mask. . . . A few locks of dry white hair clung to his scalp, like wild flowers fighting for life on a bare rock.

The similarities go beyond such things as wheelchairs and hair and leaden masks and mahogany figures: "Analyze and imitate," Chandler advised new writers, and it appears that this counsel was not lost on Macdonald.

Archer's Don Quixote complex is as likely to fix itself on a disturbed young man as on an innocent young woman, but the personality quirk is the same as Marlowe's. Where the two part company is in the former's psychological approach to each mystery—he speaks often of the *Gestalt* of a case—which Marlowe consciously avoids, as Chandler's opinion of the whole field of psychoanalysis was low. As early as *The Doomsters,* one year before *The Galton Case,* Macdonald is experimenting with interpersonal relationships within families, and he takes an increasingly closer look at them as the series progresses. The suggestion is that corruption exists not only among civil authority, as Hammett showed, and in society, as Chandler showed, but in the human spirit itself. Moral crime has as much substance as its civil counterpart; moreover, it's

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worse because it can't be legislated and is ultimately more damaging in its effect.

(Her thumbs hooked in the fragile silk of the panties and pulled them down. She stepped out of them as delicately as one coming from a bathtub. She was completely naked now. . . . She leaned forward to kiss me, her arms going out to encircle my neck.)

The roar of the .45 shook the room. Charlotte staggered back a step. . . . Slowly, she looked down at the ugly swelling in her naked belly where the bullet went in. A thin trickle of blood welled out. . . .

"How c-could you?" she gasped.

I only had a moment before talking to a corpse, but I got it in.

"It was easy," I said.

Mickey Spillane, whose career stands on this closing scene from *I, the Jury,* is a graphic example of the kind of writer that Chandler once said thinks "the shortest distance between two points is from a blonde to a bed." In the many books featuring private eye Mike Hammer, frank nudity enters over-the-counter literature and the overt sadism that had formerly belonged to the villain becomes a weapon of the hero. Marlowe might be provoked into kicking a tormentor in the stomach and Spade might strip-search a woman when a large bill comes up missing, but only Hammer would ram a punk's teeth down his throat with the barrel of his .45 or shove a reluctant informant's head into a toilet.

Hammer was to have been the subject of a comic strip entitled *Mike Danger* until economic circumstance drove Spillane to write a book instead, and the saga of his vigilante hero retains the blunt simplicity that enabled comic books to edge out the pulps after World War II. At the beginning of *I, the Jury,* having found a close friend brutally murdered, Hammer vows: "I'm going to get the one that did this." He does, thus setting the pattern for all the sequels. Being a friend of Mike Hammer's is very nearly as hazardous as being his enemy, for their bodies turn up with frightening regularity. And it's a fair bet that a beautiful woman is responsible.

But Spillane and Hammer are a sideshow, and despite astronomical sales figures they've had little or no effect on the development of the genre. Influence and innovation will always be the charges of craftsmen like Chandler and Macdonald.

With the apparent retire-

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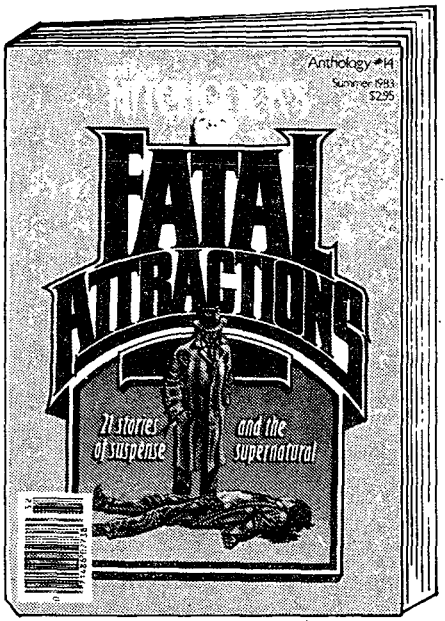
ment of Ross Macdonald in 1976, private eye fiction began searching for a writer to take it down a new road. John D. MacDonald has assumed that task more or less by default with his Travis McGee, who although he calls himself a "salvage consultant" accepts assignments for which an investigator's license is required anywhere in this country. Gangling, aging boat-bum McGee takes Marlowe's and Archer's chivalry to its tired extreme: "Creaking knight errant," he describes himself in *The Green Ripper,* "yawning at the thought of the next dragon." But this is not the McGee of 1964's *The Deep Blue Goodbye* and its immediate sequel, *Nightmare in Pink,* struggling to maintain his sanity in a world gone mad on its own horrors, but a pale Mike Hammer clone vowing vengeance against his friends' killers and tormentors. Robert B. Parker's Spenser, too, for all his self-conscious apery of Philip Marlowe, is as simplistic as Hammer but not nearly as electric, and his code is obvious to the point of burlesque. So the search continues.

The private eye is not, as has been claimed, an endangered species. He has merely gone underground to wait for another Hammett or Chandler or Macdonald to dredge him up and point him in fresh directions. He is too visceral to be left to rot. His aloneness and his willingness to battle stacked odds trace their roots to an adolescent nation's defiant cry for independence. That his most loyal fans are men cannot be ignored, as his maleness, underscored by distrust of women, satisfies an urge frustrated early in life by the warning that boys must not use their one advantage, their superior strength, against girls. And the Puritan work ethic is upheld; even Philip Marlowe at his most noble never did a job without pay. Raymond Chandler said of his hero and the type:

> I think he will always have a fairly shabby office, a lonely house, a number of affairs, but no permanent connection. I think he will always be awakened at some inconvenient hour by some inconvenient person to do some inconvenient job. It seems to me that that is his destiny — possibly not the best destiny in the world, but it belongs to him. No one will ever beat him, because by his nature he is unbeatable. No one will ever make him rich, because he is destined to be poor. But somehow, I think he would not have it otherwise.

Nor, it seems, would we.

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BOOKED & PRINTED

by Mary Cannon



MICHAEL INNES

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Fiction can, figuratively, take a reader by the hand and guide him through a world quite different from his own. The worlds that novelists create can also differ from one another as dramatically as each differs from the reader's reality. Furthermore, different novelists can elicit very different responses from the same readers. Are you still with me?

I am prefacing this recommendation of the John Appleby novels penned by Michael Innes with the above babbling because I know some of you like your mysteries tough-minded, up-to-date, and fast-paced. If you are one of those readers, I suspect you'll find Michael Innes's world much too quirky, farcical, and fantastical, and I want to suggest that you skip the rest of this column, and reread your Dick Francis collection.

But if you are like me, and you ask only that a novelist takes you someplace *different* —and if you're very open-minded about your eventual destination—then I urge you to sample several of the Appleby novels.

Michael Innes is a pseudonym for John Innes Mackintosh Stewart. Not surprisingly, he is British, born in Edinburgh in 1906. His academic career

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rivals Appleby's in police work, and his list of fictional works is as long as your arm. If you find yourself enjoying Stewart's writing, you have hours of pleasure in store for you.

John Appleby was created by his Oxford-don author in the 1930's. He stands among a popular breed of policeman of that era who could be termed "gentlemen detectives." Appleby isn't high-born, but he is the beneficiary of a liberal education, and he eventually marries well. As the years pass, one can watch his progression from detective to commissioner of the metropolitan police at Scotland Yard, ultimately earning himself a knighthood in the bargain. One sees his happiness in his long-standing marriage to a strong-minded sculptress, and even becomes acquainted with son Bobby. (The latter grows up to be something of a pain, a little-read but highly acclaimed "non-novelist" who is featured in *An Awkward Lie.)*

There is a donnish quality about Appleby that often makes him the "straight" character, the perfect foil to the whimsical folks who populate many of the tales. Certainly his tendency to spout scraps of poetry and the like make it fair to say that if you enjoy Edmund Crispin's Gervase Fen mysteries, you'll also appreciate the Appleby tales. Like Crispin, Innes too seems fond of "the chase," although his method may vary from an insanely complicated romp through a huge mansion (as in *The Open House)* to a more serious flight from real danger. But many of the minor characters in these books are reminiscent of Fen's fellows in their eccentricities. *Sheiks and Adders,* for instance, published this year by Dodd, Mead, has the retired Appleby making his escape in a hot-air balloon with a very unusual Arab prince. Yet the sheik stands out among the crowd as one of the saner specimens attending the manic lawn party from which the balloon ascends.

Look for hardcovers from Dodd, Mead, and you'll find some of the paperback editions from Penguin. And, of course, your local library probably has a complete collection. Innes has had his diehard fans for over forty years now, and he's rewarded them with a long, long list of mystery titles, although not all of them feature Appleby. Among those that do, *Hamlet, Revenge!* is a favorite of mine from among the early books, while *The Ampersand Papers* seems one of the more popular later books. After you've run through all the John Appleby mysteries, you still have the

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non-Appleby mysteries to contemplate, or the non-mystery novels he's written as J. I. M. Stewart. Together there are more than fifty books, which means that Stewart has defined his fictional worlds rather thoroughly. John Appleby would certainly approve of his author's careful methods.

MYSTERY REVIEWS

Pierre Audemars' conceit in **The Bitter Path of Death** is his framework for his great detective's most puzzling case. Monsieur Pinaud is now retired from the Paris Sûreté, the site of his long and astoundingly successful career as a police investigator. During one of his not infrequent and pleasantly alcoholic dinners with his long-time friend and faithful chronicler, the talk turns to one of the most baffling cases of M. Pinaud's youth. The two old friends agree to publish the tale of the murder of Edmond Laroche, the most prestigious jeweler in Paris at that time. The novel, published by Walker and Company, does present an intriguing case: the wicked, wealthy man, murdered by a stiletto, appears to be the victim of one of the members of a respectable, working-class family. After all, the father and brother both have an old fashioned sense of honor, and the mother is equally shattered by the knowledge that her beautiful daughter will soon bear Laroche's bastard child. Only the girl claims that the unscrupulous jeweler really loved her, and even intended marriage. Pinaud is instinctively inclined to agree with the girl—and someone is methodically trying to murder Pinaud himself, and to make it look like a car accident. Many may find Pinaud and his world a bit stodgy and contrived but there's a nice atmosphere to the book, and some will surely find him as ingratiating as his loyal chronicler always has. ($11.95, 175 pp.)

St. Martin's Press, publisher of so many excellent new mystery titles in cloth editions, has initiated a new reprint series of trade paperbacks. At $5.95, the books are larger than rack-size, easy to read, and packaged with striking photographic covers. One of the first in the series is John Buxton Hill's **Playground of Death**. The novel opens as Detective Superintendent Kenworthy of Scotland Yard arrives in the smallish town of Filton-in-Leckerfield. One of the town's leading citizens, a man who pulled himself up from its poorest neighborhood, has apparently murdered his wife. A few days later, while in custody, the accused—Bielby—is

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himself shot by a rooftop sniper. It seems that Bielby had been closely tied to the town's wealthiest politicos—and he has left behind an unfinished draft of his memoirs which named names. The Yard in the person of Kenworthy has been summoned to assure an unbiased investigation. Kenworthy becomes fascinated with the manuscript, which details Bielby's early years, and the detective's own sleuthing convinces him that the key to the double murder lies in Bielby's distant past. This is a suspenseful study of characterization, eerily haunted by Bielby's ghost, in the guise of his incomplete autobiography. *Playground of Death* is a strong entry for the new "Fingerprint Mystery" series. (160 pp.)

John Kruse has happily combined the high-wire tension of a superbly plotted thriller with full-blooded characters who are capable of ensnaring readers emotionally. The book is **Red Omega**, a long novel with a clever premise based on historical fact (the death of Stalin), and loaded with insider's material on post WWII Moscow. At the novel's center is Joaquin Cabeza, a Spanish revolutionary who's already survived more than one country's death camp—and whose newest mission teaches him a lesson at least as important as survival: how to love another human being more than a cause. Cabeza's a rare man, and no reader will be able to resist cheering him on as he wends his way among those who inhabit the murky world of international espionage. (Pocket Books, $3.50, 393 pp.)

It would be doing Frank Orenstein a service if I were to come up with a better word than "breezy" to describe **Murder on Madison Avenue**, but offhand, I can't. Still, the lack of ingenuity is mine, not his, because this first novel, set in the milieu of a frenzied research department of a top-flight advertising agency, is fresh and clever and very engaging. While the Big Apple is characteristically portrayed here as the city New Yorkers love to hate, the *other* characters are something different. Very special indeed is narrator Ev Franklin, a fortyish vice-president with a keen sense of humor, a nose for investigation, and a long-held dream of retiring to upstate New York to become an orchard-keeper. At novel's end, Ev has solved a murder and sprung two innocent men accused of the crime, as well as convinced his female sidekick to tie the knot. But the economy has set back his plans for that early retirement. I suppose it's too much to ask that someone else at Finch, Rowan & Hyde advertising agency will soon need the aid of an amateur criminologist . . . ? (St. Martin's Press, $13.95, 228 pp.)

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Perhaps K. C. Constantine isn't a new name to you, because **The Man Who Liked Slow Tomatoes** (Penguin Books, $2.95, 177 pp.) is only one of a series of mysteries featuring Mario Balzic. This just happened to have been my introduction to the chief of police in Rocksburg, Pennsylvania: a man with a big heart, a short fuse, a loving family, and a yen for Mondavi wine, very chilled. While Balzic is grappling with the small-town bureaucracy set up to cope with an impending policemen's strike, he's also trying to unravel a twisted skein known in police jargon as a "D&D." (It stands for "domestic disturbance.") Balzic becomes involved in this particular D&D partly to escape the bargaining sessions and labor negotiations, and partly because the wife—who claims her husband is missing, and who then goes on to reveal the hell that her married life has been since her husband lost his job—turns out to be the daughter of an old union buddy of Mario's dead father. This is a toughminded peek into one working-class home in small-town urban America, and the ending is no less credible for its also being shocking and tragic. Through it all, Mario maintains his compassion and sense of justice. If you haven't met this police chief yet, I suggest you try for an introduction soon.

Author Martha Grimes teaches English at a Maryland college. One can glean that much from the flap copy of her latest mystery, **The Anodyne Necklace**. But her fans will also tell you that Martha Grimes has to be an Anglophile, so lovingly rendered are her three Richard Jury mysteries. The genial Jury made his debut in *The Man with a Load of Mischief* (the name of the local pub), wherein he met the irresistible Melrose Plant, a unique aristocrat who has declined his hereditary title. The two men joined forces again in *The Old Fox Deceiv'd* (another pub so called), and fans of the first book were again treated to a solid, entertaining, old fashioned British mystery. *The Anodyne Necklace* (need I even tell you what the local pub is named?) reprises both characters, and gives Jury a promotion to superintendent at Scotland Yard. In addition to these two lovable investigators—an inspired collaboration of the professional and the amateur—Grimes again serves up a high-tea mystery, replete with red herrings, colorful local characters, and an atmosphere as British as Fortnum & Mason. Read the latest (Little, Brown and Company, $13.95, 256 pp.) and I'm willing to bet a year's supply of scones that you seek out the two you've already missed.

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THE MYSTERIOUS PHOTOGRAPH



Cartier-Bresson/Magnum

A train on its way, bearing . . . what? Or whom? We will give a prize of $25 to the person who invents the best mystery story (in 250 words or less), based on the above photograph. The story will be printed in a future issue. Reply to Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine, 380 Lexington Avenue, N.Y., N.Y. 10017.

The winning entry for the April Mysterious Photograph will be found on page 154.

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FICTION

The Man from the Misted Lake

by Ron Butler

"Coal mines in Hokkaido?" Police Inspector Toshihiko Ueki said. "What do you know about coal mines in Japan, or anywhere else?"

I put my shoulder against the new refrigerator and pushed as the inspector tugged and pulled from the other side. "I've been paid enough to find out what I need to know, and it's an offer I can't turn down."

"Umm," Ueki said, coming over to my side of the appliance, "I would gather, then, that a good sum of money is involved." With a final nudge, the refrigerator was tucked into the corner of the kitchen where its ailing predecessor once stood.

"Not only money," I remarked, brushing dust from my trousers, "but a chance to give the company's reputation a solid boost in a new business area."

The inspector inserted the plug in a wall outlet. The motor began to whirr, and he fiddled with the inside thermostat. "Hand me the beer, please. What new horizons could be of such

Illustration by Ray Lago

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interest to the computer hardware industry, Sam?"

I removed brown bottles from a grocery sack and passed them to him. "Mine safety, Toshihiko. The Tanaka Mining Company has forked over a healthy retainer to see about putting in a system that'd make underground work so riskless kids could play inside."

"So," he said agreeably, "when will you travel to Hokkaido?"

I scrutinized the wall calendar. "Let's see, Noriko and the twins will be back next Friday, so I'll aim for leaving about the seventh. That'll give me enough time to finish up the basic research and get in touch with some people about software components."

"The seventh," Ueki repeated. "If you do not plan to stay too long, Sam, I might be able to take that weekend off and perhaps add a few days of accumulated vacation."

"Why not?" I said generously. "We should be free for some sightseeing. I've never been to Hokkaido, you know."

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The inspector opened the refrigerator door. "I have never visited that frontier land, either. Do you think this beer is cold enough?"

The bottles felt warm to me. "Just right."

He grinned and pried two caps off with the bottle opener. "Then let us drink to some tourism combined with business, and to the new icebox. My daughter will be delighted to discover it when she returns."

Yes, I thought, my wife would be pleased, and it made me happy envisioning her face when she came home from an annual visit to relatives in Kobe. Noriko was frugal with our household money, but there was no doubt that the old fridge was giving her fits: it chugged and wheezed night and day to do a minimum of cooling. Noriko wouldn't come right out and say it, but I knew she was worried about the possibility of spoiled milk making the boys ill. So, as soon as she and Yumiko, our octogenarian nanny, bundled the twins and themselves off to the train station, I called a store and placed an order.

Inspector Ueki thumped his empty bottle down on the kitchen table. "You miss your family, do you not?"

Miss them? I was going bonkers, eating out of cans, trying to sleep in the empty silence of the house, wandering about aimlessly, and running up my monthly indebtedness to the telephone company at an alarming rate with my nightly calls. "I guess so," I confessed.

"In that event," he smiled, "I prescribe a visit to my home for drinks, one of Hanako's incomparable suppers, and convivial conversation."

I paused several seconds to avoid the appearance of overeagerness. "Sure it won't be any trouble?"

The inspector waited in the gravel lane as I turned the screw lock on the entranceway door. "When Sam Brent and Toshihiko Ueki are relaxing together on a fine day," he said cheerfully, "the word trouble does not exist."

We walked briskly, working up an appetite.

The meal that evening was *horakuyaki,* shrimp, chicken, ginkgo nuts, and mushrooms steam-broiled on a layer of coarse salt. The beverage was a domestic white wine, and we ended with *nashi,* pears that look like apples, and *biwa,* loquats.

"Oishi," I said with a dab of my napkin, and the corners of Mrs. Ueki's eyes were transformed into a fine mesh of laugh lines.

"If I served you sand and paste, Sam, you would tell me it was delicious."

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"Right," I admitted, "because if *you* served it, it would be."

The inspector and I helped clear the dishes away, then retired to the family room and turned on the television for the sumo matches being held in Osaka.

"I have been projecting the cost of the trip to Hokkaido," Ueki said during a commercial, "and I believe I may have found a way to reduce expenses."

"Say on."

"Yes. Well, as the primary purpose of this visit is business, why not ask Goto-san to rent an aircraft and pilot us himself? That will leave me more funds, and it would be better for you, besides being a business expense."

Actually, I deliberated, the suggestion was sound. My chief clerk was an experienced flyer, he'd undoubtedly get a kick out of being away from the office for a while, and we'd be able to ferry the computer components I'd need without the anxiety that goes with entrusting delicate equipment to commercial carriers.

"There's some merit to the idea. I'll call Goto-san."

"Do that," the inspector said, grimacing as one of his favorite wrestlers met another bipedal mountain of flesh with jarring consequences.

Goto, dressed to the nines in a natty double-breasted tweed suit, showed up within the hour and listened to the proposal with enthusiasm. Tomorrow was Sunday, but on the following day he'd go to Okayama airport and arrange for a twin-engined executive jet. "I have more than three hundred hours in such airplanes," he said, "and we will save much time."

"Great. After you've got the details worked out, I'll get on the horn with Itaru Tanaka and let him know our flight schedule." Tanaka was president of the coal mining company that wanted my services. "Now, how about a cold beer?"

"Ah," Goto sighed, "I would enjoy that, Bulentu-san, but I have a date soon."

I checked my wristwatch. "Okay, mind giving me a lift home?"

Ueki turned off the television. "There is no need to leave yet, Sam." He peered at me for a few seconds and aborted my budding fabrication about a need to do some paperwork. "Naturally, you may call Noriko from here. If you allow Hanako and me to say hello, I will even pay for the call."

It's hard for me to turn down a deal like that.

Two hours out of Okayama, the jet started bucking, solid jolts that made me appreciate the seat belt and harness. "What's

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wrong?" I asked, looking across at Goto.

He was watching the radar carefully. "We are hitting clear air turbulence now, and there seems to be an extensive storm front ahead of us."

I twisted around in my cockpit seat and looked at the inspector. He was still sleeping soundly, oblivious to the worsening flight conditions. "What'll you do, Goto-san?"

He pointed to a second set of headphones. "You can listen while I ask for instructions." He dialed a frequency on the VHF radio and activated his mike. "Hakodate Approach, this is Mitsubishi five-eight-four. We are a twin jet at six thousand meters flying course three-six-zero at three hundred knots. Our destination is Sapporo, but we are encountering moderate turbulence and have a storm system painting on radar."

If this was "moderate" roughness, I hated to think what the bad variety could do.

The reply from the southernmost city of Hokkaido was almost instantaneous. "Mitsubishi five-eight-four, your present heading will bring you into a system extending approximately seventy kilometers west to east of Hakodate. Other aircraft report severe turbulence at all altitudes."

"Understood," Goto answered. "Please redirect us to bypass the weather."

We were assigned to a course deviation to the west and a new altitude. Goto repeated the instructions and signed off. Not long after we banked to our new course, the air got smoother and I relaxed, going over my notes for the proposed new computer safety system. I had loosened my seat belt and was reaching for my briefcase when a giant hand seemed to slam me into the instrument panel.

The pain didn't match the confusion in intensity. There were too many sensory data flooding in at once: a sharp burst of sound, the high, thin protest of escaping air, Goto putting the plane into a dive.

"Goto!" Ueki shouted over the pandemonium. "How bad is it?"

"We are responding to the controls," Goto yelled back, "but I must get us down to a safer altitude!"

Sunlight faded abruptly as we knifed into a thick layer of overcast. At fifteen hundred meters, we were out of it, able to see the approaching shoreline of Hokkaido. Goto leveled off. "We will not freeze at this height, and oxygen density is sufficient." He grabbed for the mike and advised Sapporo airport of our emergency status and the change from assigned

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altitude, then looked over at me anxiously.

"Are you all right, Sam?"

I touched my forehead. "Seem to be, Masahige. What the hell happened?"

Inspector Ueki leaned into the cockpit. "The door to the lavatory is blown half away. My guess is that it was an explosive device."

It made no sense. Our jet was a rental, and even if someone wanted to kill us, when was the bomb placed aboard and, of course, *who* planted it?

Goto was on the radio again. We were cleared for a straight approach and were told that emergency vehicles would be standing by.

Was there unknown structural damage, maybe to the landing gear or the braking system? The minutes passed in agonizing slowness, and then Goto pulled the lever to lower the wheels. The instrument light indicated everything was functional, but I found myself gripping the armrest anyway.

We touched down softly and came to a stop well short of the end of the runway as the racing fire and rescue units caught up with us.

From the airport manager's office, we marched directly to a cocktail lounge, staked out a table, and ordered double scotches.

"We were damned lucky," I said, gulping a solid belt.

"The only thing that saved us," Goto concurred, "was the fact that the bomb was jarred loose when we encountered the turbulence. Had it exploded a little earlier . . . "

The preliminary investigation by Sapporo police and government aviation officials indicated that the bomb was taped to the underside of the lavatory wash basin. If it had detonated in that position, Goto said, the blast might have destroyed much of the tail section, or crippled the cables that operate the aft controls. The stainless steel basin and the plate by which it was anchored into the bulkhead and flooring deflected the explosion to the side. The result was a jagged hole in the aluminum skin of the fuselage.

Inspector Ueki drew on his cigarette. "You are too modest, Goto-san. Your respectable skills as a pilot were a major factor in bringing us down without further mishap."

I raised my glass. "I'll second that. Extracting us from that jam with nothing but a bump on the head and no damage to the computers makes me think you deserve a raise, Goto-san."

"Drink up," Ueki chuckled, "then I want to check into our hotel and begin making telephone calls to Okayama."

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There were, the inspector said, a number of assignments he wanted to give his men: check the Okayama flying service for details on past rentals of the plane we used, determine if anyone was seen entering or leaving the craft prior to our arrival at the airport, find out if any underground informants possessed information about threats from criminals whose paths had crossed Ueki's.

I was inclined to rule out Goto and myself as targets. There was no one I knew of with reason to hate either of us.

Goto got the check and we were on our way to the hotel, computer components securely placed in the taxi's trunk.

Our hotel was spacious, but only a few of the rooms were Japanese style. As I laid out the contents of my travel bag on the quilt covering of the floor bedding, I was glad we had the traditional accommodations. I was accustomed to the feel and smell of straw matting. And, I recalled with a grin, whenever I went back to the States on business, I'd sometimes awaken in the middle of the night, gripping the edge of an unfamiliar raised bed, afraid that I would tumble out. The *futon* was safe: I could roll all I wanted to and, at worst, would find myself on soft tatami.

With clothes and shaving articles stowed away, I called the coal mining company. A secretary said that Tanaka was not in at the moment, and took the name of our hotel and my room number.

I checked the stack of computer parts briefly and left the room, hoping to talk Goto and the inspector into an early supper. Flying, like almost everything else, whets my appetite.

Goto was ready, but Inspector Ueki was still on the telephone when we went to his room. "Find out anything?" I asked as he put the receiver down.

"My men know which questions to ask, Sam, but it will take time. In the morning, I will call headquarters again."

There was a message for me at the desk from Itaru Tanaka. His daughter had been hospitalized with acute appendicitis, and he would not be able to meet us the next day. Would we mind a day or two of sightseeing at his company's expense?

"What do you think?" I asked my companions. "Want to look around Hokkaido a bit before I have to get down to business?"

Ueki and Goto started amassing a collection of brochures from the hotel's travel agency, and I resigned myself to a meal without conversation as the endemic tourist fever of the Japanese led them from

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pamphlet to pamphlet.

I was wrong. Before the first dishes arrived, Inspector Ueki came up with a recommendation. "There is an Ainu festival at Lake Akan. Sam? Goto-san? Does this suggestion meet with your approval?"

Goto said it did, I said why not but what's an Ainu?

"Not *what,* Sam, *who,*" Ueki corrected me. "The Ainu are the aboriginal people of Hokkaido and probably most of the rest of Japan. Other than that, I regret that I know little about their history."

"Live and learn," I grinned. I pulled the paper wrapping off my chopsticks, thinking that a folk festival might be fun.

The outer door to my room, when I returned, was ajar. I was certain it had been locked when I left. A maid? I pushed it and saw that the inner sliding door was open, too. Strange. I hesitated, started in, and collided with a fleeing figure. Stumbling, I groped for the light switch. The fluorescents flickered to life and I froze, eyes glued to the object on top of the computers: brown cylinders, taped together, attached to a clock and battery pack.

I was moving, arms outstretched, bending, reaching for them, running to the window, kicking out glass, looking down: a garden, lit by stone lanterns. People? I saw no one, aimed for a fountain, let go, and flattened myself against a wall.

Nothing happened. I called Ueki's room and we rushed to the garden, keeping people away until the police arrived and removed the waterlogged bomb.

Sapporo Police Inspector Soichiro Ito, I guessed, was nearing retirement age. His lined face, gray hair, and melanin-spotted hands, however, did not detract from the strength of his voice and the vigor in his body movements.

"I know of your reputation, Inspector Ueki," he said, "and it will be my privilege to assist to the extent of my capabilities. Now, Brent-san, I do not wish to be offensive, but I must pose this question formally for the record: are you an agent for the CIA or any branch of American military intelligence?"

I choked, and the Sapporo policeman smiled. "I did not think so, and I will tell you why I ask."

Ueki adjusted his floor cushion. "Go on, Ito-san. I am interested."

"Brent-san," Ito said, "is carrying what appears to be sophisticated computer equipment to a part of Japan that, at one point, is only two kilometers from the nautical boundary claimed by the Soviet Union. Without revealing any secrets,

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I can assure you that electronic surveillance by all sides concerned is intense."

"So," I said somewhat testily, "check out my gadgets and you'll find out they don't have any potentials for spying."

"We have done that," Ito said calmly. "Even so, there is some reason to believe that the computers are the object of the bomb attempts."

"But," I objected, "the bomb on the airplane should have taken us out as well."

"One moment, Sam," Inspector Ueki said. "My colleague has a valid point. The fact that we were on the plane may have been incidental to the presence of the computers, and please remember that the second bomb was planted when all of us were absent."

That was a relief, in a way. Suppose I'd come back to the room a few minutes later? "Why the heck would anyone want to get rid of the computers?"

"What is their destination?" Inspector Ito asked.

"Tanaka Mining Company. It's in the Ishikari coal fields."

"Purpose?" Ito was scribbling on a folded square of paper.

"For implementing a mine safety system."

"Are the computers expensive?"

"Very." I named a sum.

Ito put his ballpoint pen down and looked at Ueki. "What is your opinion of this situation?"

Ueki got up and walked to the shattered window. "I cannot accept Soviet involvement as a viable factor because if the Russians suspected the Americans or Japanese of bringing in secret new equipment, they would try to obtain technical data or steal it, not blow it up. At this time, I am disposed to wonder if there might be someone who is opposed to improvements in the Tanaka mining operations."

Ito regarded Inspector Ueki with respect. "Yes, I think we should proceed on that assumption for the time being. Also, it would be best if Brent-san permited the Sapporo police to safeguard the computers until you are ready to install them."

"That's very generous," I said.

Ito uncrossed his legs and rose. "It is also a means of reducing the opportunities for more violence while we continue our investigations."

Goto, silent for so long, now spoke. "What about fingerprints, Inspector Ito, and did anyone see the man who put the explosives in this room?"

"One of the maids," Ito replied, "reported seeing a man running toward a stairway, but all she could tell us was that he was of average height and build and was wearing gloves."

"Not much to go on," I remarked.

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"True," said Ito, "but we have explosives experts working on trace evidence from your rented airplane and on the device that was put here."

The drapes began fluttering wildly in the chill autumn wind gusting through the broken window, and we told Ito that we were going to spend some time at the lake until Itaru Tanaka was able to meet us.

"It is a place of great beauty," he said. "The travel agency in the lobby can arrange for your transportation when it opens in the morning, and if you wish, I will call personally to reserve rooms at an excellent resort hotel where I have stayed on several occasions."

We thanked him, and after Ito's men carried out my equipment, I accepted Goto's offer to spread a spare *futon* in his room.

Japan, outside of Hokkaido, often seemed to me a land dominated by grays and browns and blacks: the city gray of concrete, steel, and sidewalks, the brown of flooded rice paddies and irrigation ditches, the black of narrow streets and lanes. And even the ever-present mountains often struck me as green breaks between the towns, villages, and cities crowded into the valleys and on the hillsides.

Here, however, seen from the window of a speeding bullet train, the last frontier of Japan was almost hypnotic in its openness, in the vast stretches of verdure and the stately forests of pine and birch, beech, oak, and larch. There were rolling pastures that supported Japan's dairy herds, farms that dwarfed the average two or three acres on the other islands, and mile after mile of relief from polluting factories, shipyards, steel mills, refineries, and the sprawling urban areas around them.

"A yen for your thoughts," Inspector Ueki said from the seat facing me.

I looked away from the scenery and laughed. "Hokkaido is so uncrowded it makes me homesick."

"Personally," Goto sniffed, "all this emptiness makes me nervous."

On that note, we got our luggage down from the overhead racks and prepared to disembark for the last leg of our trip—a bus ride to Lake Akan and my introduction to the Ainu people.

The air was damp and oppressive, ropy tendrils of mist twisting across the waters of the lake in the gathering gloom. As the last of the gray light faded, a bonfire was lighted by the shore, its smoke hovering and mixing with the wet smell

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of decay from October leaves littering the ground.

The robes worn by the six women dancing single-file around the fire had no elaborate bowed sashes like the Japanese kimono, and the designs, sinuous patterns of light against dark, also were like nothing I could associate with any other people of Asia.

The eeriness I felt, however, was not in the dance, which was a series of simple steps around the fire, but in the chanting of the old Ainu women to one side. The words of their song were clipped, almost blunt, repeated over and again and then rising at times like the shrill cry of some night animal.

Inspector Ueki, standing to my right, broke the spell with a low warning. *"Mendo desho."* Trouble coming. Following the direction of his glance, I saw six men lurching toward the fire, laughing coarsely.

In an instant, the drunks were among the Ainu dancers, bumping into them, going through a mocking imitation of the steps, shouting out gleefully to other tourists.

And then, with a scream, one of the dancers tripped and fell into the fire. The drunks drew back, still laughing, as Goto ran to her side, slapping at her smoldering robe with his jacket, and when the intruders made their move toward him, the inspector and I made ours against them.

As the other tourists scattered like sparks in the wind, Ueki cut through the offenders with chops and kicks delivered with the numbing precision of the karate expert he was. My contribution was a single punch, and I would have avoided even that if the man hadn't tried to bash my nose.

The rowdies crawled off into the night and we were alone with the dancers and the old women, who had not moved. "Are you all right?" Ueki asked the dancer who had tumbled into the flaming branches.

She looked at each of us carefully, eyes remaining on me a moment longer than on the others. "I have some slight burns, but they are insignificant. I thank each of you for your kindness."

Close to the fire, I couldn't see that her features were any different from those of other Japanese women.

"If you do not need further assistance," the inspector said, "we will return to our lodgings."

Dimly, through the thickening fog, we saw the dock lights where the lake steamer that brought us from our resort hotel was waiting. The air was cold and penetrating, and I was anticipating a jar of hot sake before a long steaming bath.

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But we never saw the hotel again.

Instead, we disappeared into the enveloping vapors, following in the footsteps of a man who came to us with a warning of danger.

In the unfamiliar dark, I could not estimate time, yet it seemed that hours passed as we strove to keep up with our mysterious guide, the man from the misted lake. All I could ascertain of our surroundings was that we were walking away from the lake shore, ascending through woods which I guessed were thick and dark even in the daylight hours.

The soughing of the wind in unseen boughs and the occasional scampering sounds of furtive night animals accentuated the sense of isolation: here there were none of the familiar sounds of traffic, of distant trains, or the lights that cast their reassuring glow over a city even as its inhabitants slumbered.

Later we were to learn that the Ainu *kotan* was situated some four kilometers northeast of the lake, in the midst of a silent, primeval forest of birch, remote from any of the larger villages or towns where camera-bedecked tourists mingled briefly with the native people. We were told, after we reached safety, that this remote village consisted of only six houses, a last refuge of the elders of an ancient race.

Toru Chihaya's *chisei,* where we were eventually taken, was in all respects similar to the other *kotan* homes: the simple wood framework was covered by bulrushes and bark, and entry was gained through a low shed in front. The one sacred window opened on the east, and in the communal room, where we sat by an open pit fire, woven mats covered a packed dirt floor.

"Do you find it primitive?" the elder's son, Zenjiro, asked, fixing me with flinty gray eyes. Zenjiro, the person who'd led us to this place, appeared to have assumed full responsibility for our protection and welfare.

"I find it different," I smiled.

The younger Ainu directed his gaze to Inspector Ueki and Goto. "And what of you, welcome guests? Are you comfortable here?"

Ueki cradled a cup of sweet white sake in his hands, savoring its smell. "With kind hosts and pleasant drink, no one can be uncomfortable."

Zenjiro peered at me again. "I have never seen a man with hair of red and blue eyes before. Tell me, do you find me as strange to look upon as I do you?"

That was blunt—but honest. And, yes, I did find these two

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men unusual in appearance. There was nothing of Asia in the wavy beards and hair, the light, rounded eyes, or the paleness of their skins.

Both of them wore headdresses that could have come out of old Persia, part crown, part flattened turban, apparently sewn from folded lengths of cloth. The elder, Toru, with his white hair and fierce mustaches, reminded me of a stereotyped Viking, an old warrior ready to leap from the prow of his ship, leading Norsemen to battle.

The two Ainu leaned back on their elbows, roaring with laughter, when I put this into words. Zenjiro lifted his mustache with a stick and drained his sake cup. "To be compared with Vikings is amusing, Brent-san, because we Ainu have a heritage of hunting rather than warfare." His mood shifted to solemnity. "And it is hunting, perhaps, that we should discuss now. As I have told you, it would be dangerous for you to return to the hotel."

Inspector Ueki offered cigarettes to our hosts. "You have explained that someone approached a clerk you know at the hotel and demanded that he be kept advised of our whereabouts."

"Yes," Zenjiro said. "The man claimed to be a special police investigator for Hokkaido Prefecture, trailing two Japanese criminals and their American accomplice."

Ueki held his hands out toward the crackling logs. "Then your friend became suspicious?"

Zenjiro nodded. "The clerk knew that one of you—Ueki-san—was a policeman because Inspector Ito of Sapporo had told him that when he made the reservations. The clerk called Ito-san and was asked to warn the three of you immediately that your lives, and not merely some equipment, now seemed in jeopardy. I rowed my own boat across the lake to tell you."

"You may have put your village in harm's way by taking that responsibility," Ueki said. "I am unarmed while on vacation, but the man who seeks us has made two earlier attempts, each involving explosives. If he traces us to your *kotan* . . . "

"He will not surprise us," Zenjiro said confidently. "I remained concealed at the dance, and there are other Ainu hunters keeping watch outside. No one will get past them."

"Were the local police informed?" Ueki said.

"No," answered Zenjiro. "It was my belief that it would take too long and that the person who has been asking questions about you might follow them."

The interrogatory bubble that had been bobbing around in my head finally popped. "How come

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you brought us here, Chihaya-san? Wouldn't a simple warning have fulfilled your promise to your friend, the clerk?

Zenjiro ran his fingers through his beard. "That was my intention. But then I saw how you went to the aid of the women who were dancing when those drunkards arrived."

Inspector Ueki was staring into the fire. After a few moments, he raised his head and contemplated our benefactors. "I will always be thankful that fate has brought the threads of our lives together. On the practical side, however, it is urgent that I make a telephone call to Inspector Ito and see what we can do to extricate ourselves from this predicament. Also, Sam Brent has some business calls to make."

Zenjiro got up from the matting and stirred the fire with a long stick. "Before dawn, I will take you by rowboat to a larger village where you will find a telephone and, if you need it, transportation. Now, if your stomachs are like mine, it is time for food."

The women were old, walking with the jerky shuffle that bespeaks advanced arthritis. On first greeting, they called out in reedy, soulful whines, mournful save for the skin-creasing smiles. Each had a blue tattoo across the upper lip, and the language they spoke with each other and the two Ainu men was like none I'd heard before.

In front of us they placed carved wood trays with grilled meats, chopped white radish, bits of boiled potatoes, and dried, smoked cod, herring, and salmon.

Zenjiro Chihaya watched us closely as we picked up our chopsticks and sampled the food. Inspector Ueki and Goto chewed with looks of puzzlement on their faces while I worked away with gusto.

"That is bear steak," Zenjiro said, grinning.

"Reminds me a little of aged venison," I said between bites. "Damned good."

The inspector switched to the cod, Goto concentrated on the salmon. With my chopsticks, I removed the portions of bear from my companions' plates. "This," I said sincerely, "is food fit for an epicure."

"Glutton, you mean," Ueki grumbled.

I didn't care. Even with someone looking for us with malice in his heart, I could be content—for the moment. My living comes from electronic wizardry, but I'm a romantic by nature. Sitting in this smoky room, with friends old and new on each side, aware that I was seeing a way of life unknown to most of the world—that was sufficient.

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The trays were removed, more logs tossed in the fire pit, and fresh jars of the white sake brought out. The women sat down with us, and switching to Japanese, asked where I came from, what America was like, what my countrymen ate, how I liked Hokkaido, how old I was, the names of my wife and children, and how long we could stay.

After I answered to their satisfaction, I had a question of my own: who are the Ainu and where did they come from?

Zenjiro and Toru Chihaya seemed pleased that I wanted to know, and as the earth spun us toward the dawn, they spoke of their past and what they feared would come with the future.

No one, Zenjiro said, knows the ultimate origins of the people who call themselves Ainu. Scientists who studied their ancient artifacts and burials could trace them back for seven thousand years on Hokkaido, and maybe longer than that on the main island of Honshu. Through the millennia, they were slowly pushed back by migrations of invaders from the Asian mainland until only Hokkaido was left to them. They were ignored for the most part until the trade that began with the Japanese in the sixteenth century ended with the Ainu as vassals of feudal warlords on Honshu.

"Can you imagine," Zenjiro said, "that our reign over these ancestral lands ceased when we began to trade furs for beads and brocades?"

Yeah, it's happened before, but I didn't say anything.

Once, Zenjiro continued, the Ainu found abundance everywhere, taking the many gifts from the sea, cooking pots brimming with the offerings of bear and deer and squirrel, living in harmony with black marten, fish owls, red-crowned cranes, red and arctic fox, and the seals that winter on the shores of the Sea of Okhotsh.

In every aspect of nature (Zenjiro related), the Ainu saw *kamui,* the spiritual beings found in fire, animals, mountain streams and seas, plants, trees, mountains, and birds. But of all living creatures, the one most revered, most sacred to the Ainu, was the brown bear.

He moved closer to the fire pit, empty cup still in his hand. "Now the bears are almost gone, hunted for their pelts and the bounties paid by the government—paid because of a few people who are attacked from time to time, who know too little of nature's ways. And people shoot animals from snowmobiles, so that each year we have

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fewer and fewer skulls of bears and fox to make our altars."

Inspector Ueki walked to Zenjiro's side, features drawn in an uncharacteristic sadness. "Everything this man says is factual. I did not know much of Ainu history, but I am aware that they face many problems. And they are so mixed with the Japanese that only a few now speak their native language or resemble their ancestors physically."

"How many?" Goto asked.

"Twenty thousand people on Hokkaido," Zenjiro said, "claim Ainu affinity, but they are virtually indistinguishable from the Japanese—except for some twenty or thirty like us."

"But," I ventured, "you're keeping the old ways alive, like that festival dance we saw a few hours back."

Toru Chihaya smiled. "That is a *recent* tradition, Brent-san, begun in 1954 to honor a form of lake algae that represents our respect for all life forms."

"To be exact," Zenjiro elaborated, "it is a *tourist* festival which serves two purposes aside from the religious. It demonstrates to visitors that we do have our own distinct beliefs, and it also brings some much-needed money into the hotels and souvenir shops. But there are more serious matters than festivals to occupy our thoughts. We must not forget them."

"Such as?" I asked.

"That, somehow, we have to keep our meaningful traditions, our sacred rituals, and our language alive for the younger generation."

An owl screeched in the woods.

"It is time to leave," Zenjiro said abruptly. "You have your own problems to confront now."

W.

Zenjiro rowed expertly from the stern of his boat, and we glided over the smooth surface of Lake Akan. The only sounds I could identify in the unbroken darkness were the occasional faint creak of an oarlock and the lap of water against the hull.

Almost imperceptibly, the night gave way to the pearly translucence of a fog-diffused dawn and the first, tentative calls of waking birds. Visibility expanded meter by meter, and within a few minutes, we were helping Zenjiro beach the boat near a large village.

He led the way to a ramshackle wood building whose fading red banner proclaimed it a tobacconist's shop. Zenjiro rapped at the door and called out in Japanese. Shortly thereafter, a sleepy-eyed man in an informal kimono let us in.

Mikiya Yamazaki listened to Zenjiro without interruption, then insisted that we go with him to his living quarters above the store. "It is too early to

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place your calls yet, gentlemen. Will you please share breakfast tea with me, or something to eat?"

Yamazaki was, as I guessed, one of those Japanese-looking Ainu. While we waited, he told us about the rest of his villagers: some were independent farmers, many produced souvenir wood carvings or the rush baskets called *attush*, made from the inner bark of elms, and others drove taxis, held factory jobs, or worked in government offices in neighboring towns.

Mrs. Yamazaki served more tea, and Inspector Ueki then called his counterpart in Sapporo, talking at length. When he turned away from the telephone, his expression was grave.

"What I have to tell you," he said, looking from face to face, "surpasses most criminal brutality. The clerk at the resort hotel who asked Zenjiro Chihaya to warn us has been found murdered, and I will not conceal the fact that this elderly man was tortured first."

Mrs. Yamazaki excused herself and hurried from the room, and Ueki gave us his reconstruction of what might have happened: outside, after work, the clerk on his way home, stopped by the man who sought us, being forced to an isolated spot, trying to act as if nothing had happened, then admitting in terrible pain that he had talked to Inspector Ito and requested a friend to cross the lake with an urgent message.

After that, the old man's pain—and hope—faded with the twist of a bent coat hanger.

"Yamazaki-san," Ueki said, "we do not want our danger to involve you, so we will wait somewhere beyond the village until Inspector Ito is here."

"No," Yamazaki said, shaking his head adamantly. "It would be shameful to have you leave whatever protection my home offers. I will hear no more of it."

We took turns keeping watch from the window.

Inspector Soichiro Ito was with us by noon. As the tobacconist ushered him into the room, Ito called out with marked pleasure as he saw Zenjiro Chihaya. Both men knelt, bowing so low their heads touched the tatami.

The Sapporo policeman straightened and smiled at Ueki. "By now, I suppose you and your friends have seen a good many Ainu customs. This mode of greeting is one of them."

"You?" I said, matching his smile. "You're an Ainu, too?"

Ito laughed pleasantly. "Only in my heart, Brent-san. Years ago—too many years to think of—I was naive enough to go camping during the winter and was caught in a mountain pass

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during a blizzard. Toru Chihaya, Zenjiro's father, found me, and the people of his *kotan* somehow thawed out my miserable bones and restored me to life."

"For that," Inspector Ueki said, "all of us are thankful. We are also grateful that you have been kind enough to travel here to help us once more."

Ito lowered himself to a cushion. "It is not all kindness, Ueki-san. This affair is part of a continuing investigation of the attempted bombing in Sapporo, and all police divisions in the prefecture are cooperating to find the person who murdered the hotel clerk."

"So," Ueki said with a note of professional approval. "What have you uncovered?"

Ito took his jacket off, folded it, and placed it by the cushion. "We have no leads in the clerk's murder, but I have been in touch with your men in Okayama. They found out that someone went to the flying service before you arrived and asked which airplane was yours. This person told one of the mechanics on duty that he was a pilot employed by Mr. Brent's company, so no one was suspicious when he said he wanted to enter the jet to check it out. Unfortunately, no one noticed that Goto-san was not the same man when you got there later."

"Was there a description of the subject?" Ueki asked.

"*Hai*," said Ito, "but it was of little help. Our man, apparently, is of average height and build, and the mechanic could not remember any distinguishing features."

"Like the maid's description of the guy who put the bomb in the hotel room," I tossed in. "Just your average murderous lunatic."

The remainder of Inspector Ito's information was, I thought, equally useless: the explosives, as determined by laboratory analysis, were a common variety used in construction or mining, and there were indications that our man was clever enough to wear gloves.

Once his summary was out of the way, Ito directed his attention my way. "Brent-san, I do not like the idea of you and your friends staying in the vicinity of the murder any longer. I think that you should make arrangements to go to the Ishikari coal fields immediately. I have my car outside with your computers and the luggage I retrieved from the resort hotel."

Goto, Ueki, and I passed a few grins back and forth. Now we could begin to think about a shave and a change of clothes. "I'll call Itaru Tanaka now," I said.

Tanaka was back in his office and said he was ready to receive

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us whenever convenient. This evening? Fine.

I made one other call, to Noriko, and then Zenjiro Chihaya asked if he might go with us.

"Why?" Ito said.

"It is my country. I am concerned."

"*Ikimasho,*" Ito smiled. Let's go.

We talked of change, of the rise and ebb of human fortunes, as Soichiro Ito drove us north and then west in his compact late-model station wagon. This change, Zenjiro recognized, was inevitable, but what of his people, the thousands of years of tradition? Would the hunters of steely gray eyes and magnificent beards go the way of the wildlife that became scarcer with the passing of each season?

Inspector Ito, who had listened without comment for a time, wasn't optimistic. "There was a day," he said, "when I was young, when there were few people here. So few, the farmers made annual trips to Osaka to find women willing to come back to Hokkaido as wives in an undeveloped land. But there were compensations. The crime rate was low, people knew one another, and the coal, timber, and other resources were barely touched. Even then, it was difficult for the Ainu because each new settler, each new business, meant that much less land, that much more crowding of their people in villages. And, within a few years, all of us here are going to be smothered in an avalanche of people."

Ito spoke of one of the modern miracles of engineering, the world's largest undersea tunnel, and the sleek bullet trains that soon would carry passengers by the thousands as they rocketed through the thirty-three-mile passageway connecting Honshu with Hokkaido. Some would be tourists, others would stay, and each year more and more men armed with shotguns instead of bow and arrow would bring in the bearskins and pocket the bounties of up to two thousand dollars.

Zenjiro looked out toward his native mountains. "The day of the dying bear is at hand, and it may be that we who worship it will also vanish."

I know I can't change the world, but damned if I wouldn't like to try. Sometimes.

On the way to Tanaka Mining Company, we passed through one deserted coal town after another: empty streets, rows of rotting company housing, small shops and restaurants with sagging roofs, public bath houses with broken windows.

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Many of the mines shut down in the 1950's, Inspector Ito explained, because of high operating costs, but with the period of cheap oil in the past, mining was now profitable.

At the entrance to Tanaka Mining, we watched a shift of workers emerging from a shaft. Each wore a yellow metal hat with a lamp and carried a towel around his neck. Battery packs and emergency breathing equipment were hung from their belts.

The office was a few meters behind the company bath, where the men would soap, rinse, and soak before returning to their homes. As we got out of the car, the door opened and a man came out to meet us.

"I am Itaru Tanaka," he said. We bowed and introduced ourselves.

Tanaka asked us into the office building, which was a warren of cubbyholes for about a dozen secretaries and clerks, and took us to a back room overlooking mountains of coal being loaded into the cars of a narrow-gauge unit train by a conveyor system.

Inspector Ito waited until we established that Tanaka's daughter was recovering from the removal of her appendix, then brought up the reason for his presence. "So you see," he concluded, "this is more than a routine police inquiry. One man has died, and there have been two incidents with bombs. Tanaka-san, one hypothesis we have developed is that someone in competition with your company may be attempting to prevent installation of Brent-san's computer system."

"Yes," Tanaka said thoughtfully, "I suppose there is always that possibility, although I know nothing about it."

Back to square one? I thought. And then the mention of competition started a chain of associations. Could it just possibly be that one of *my* competitors, someone in the computer hardware business, was out to put a dramatic end to my success, not caring who else was hurt in the process? The computer industry plays with megabucks, and the rivalry did have a tendency to erupt into nastiness like espionage, theft, and bribery.

Negative, I computed silently. Anyone out to get me could do it in Okayama, without the added risk of detection by repeated attempts.

We talked it over a few minutes longer, and decided that we should get into a discussion of specifics as soon as possible. Inspector Ito said he could spare a few more days if needed.

"With so many friends around you, Brent-san," Tanaka remarked, "I would not worry too much. Ueki-san has told me that he, too, is a policeman. I

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think you can relax."

"I do not think we can afford to underestimate the potential for danger with an opponent such as ours," Ueki said solemnly. "He has demonstrated a willingness to go to any lengths to achieve his goal, whatever that may be."

Tanaka shrugged. "Very well. I will ask all my people to be alert for strangers, and when Hideo Kishida returns, I will inform him of the situation."

"Thank you," said Ito. "Is this Kishida-san one of your employees?"

"Hideo has the title of vice-president," Tanaka smiled, "but, in fact, he is my junior partner, in Sapporo now to handle some tax matters."

"All right," I said briskly, "when do you want to start talking about details of the proposed system?"

Tanaka watched while Ueki lighted a cigarette. "After Hideo is back tomorrow. I recommend that all of you stay at my home tonight so we can make the most of the time available to us."

We accepted.

"Much better," Goto sighed.

If he thought I was going to demur, he was off base. I bit into a *koge* rice ball sprinkled with dried flakes of seaweed, polished off the last morsels of tender pork, and considered the wisdom of another glazed yam. The tautness of my belt begged for moderation, and I complied.

Tanaka seemed remote, uninterested in the small talk going on about him. Thinking about the coming business discussions? Who could tell? Whatever the reason, his home was worth looking at. It was an old farmhouse, constructed of timber that had silvered with age, and the thatched roof of the old barn that used to be connected with the main building was a reminder of times gone by. The indoor plumbing and electrical wiring were concessions to modern wants, but heating was accomplished by means of potbellied coal stoves, whose doglegged chimney pipes added to the rustic ambience.

At a little past nine, a man in his early twenties padded into the family room in his stocking feet. Tanaka gazed at him intently for a few seconds, then introduced his son, Takashi, a mining engineer.

"He is learning the coal business from me," Tanaka said.

Takashi looked around, nodded, and took a cushion some distance from the rest of us. Like his father, he appeared to be preoccupied—or terribly serious. That, I thought, would be understandable. Nepotism is common in Japanese business, but a son working for his father is expected to do more, not less.

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I tried to draw Takashi out several times, but my efforts never elicited more than a grunted monosyllable, and Tanaka's son finally got up and left without a word to anyone.

Goto caught my eye and shrugged. Well, anyone could have a bad day, and Takashi did look a little tired. Come to think of it, if I weren't so bushed myself, would I be finding fault with people I'd only known for a few minutes?

"What do you say to a little walk, Goto-san? Clear away some of the cobwebs."

We went outside, ventilating lungs and brains with deep inhalations of crisp October air. The sky was moonless and clear, and Goto was trying to teach me the Japanese names for some of the constellations when I became aware that another person was behind us.

"Toshihiko?" I said, turning casually.

It was not Inspector Ueki, but a stranger. He approached slowly until he could see us better in the light spilling from the house windows. "Oh."

I could have sworn he was disappointed—or angry. "Uh, I'm Sam Brent and this is my good friend, Masahige Goto."

He stepped back a few paces. "Yes."

"Can we help you?" Goto asked.

Several awkward seconds went by. "My name is Hideo Kishida, and I am here to see Tanaka-san."

"He's inside," I volunteered, then added: "We're just on our way back in."

Kishida let us go first. Tanaka got up when he saw his junior partner. "Hideo. Please enter and meet these people."

Kishida gave us abbreviated bows and sat down, avoiding our eyes. Was everyone connected with the mine a grouch?

There were a few feeble attempts at general conversation, then we took turns in the wood bath behind Tanaka's house. The hot water brought out the tiredness that had been building over the past day, and I thanked my host and his wife again for their hospitality and ambled off to the seven-mat room where pallets were spread for the visitors.

Morning brought problems. The foremost should have been ironing out the technical details for the safety system. Instead, I found myself confronted with the stark hostility between Zenjiro Chihaya and Hideo Kishida.

We were gathered outside the office building, where we could take in the surface operations of the mining company. Kishida kept his eyes on Zenjiro the whole time, making no

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effort to conceal the feeling behind his looks: What is *he* doing here?

Zenjiro took it for longer than I could have, then returned the glare, unblinking. "Do not be nervous, Kishida." (No *san.*) "We Ainu hunt only four-legged animals."

Kishida looked as if he had been slapped. "You *dare* speak to me like that?"

"Hideo!" Tanaka stepped between them. "We have work to do."

"I am sorry," Kishida said, but his tone carried little in the way of regret.

I called Inspector Ueki aside. "Can you keep an eye on them, Toshihiko?"

Ueki's expression was hard. "In the course of one hour, Sam, Kishida has told me that he does not like policemen, has voiced some unkind opinions of outsiders in general and redheaded ones in particular, and has advised Inspector Ito that there is no need for security precautions as long as one competent man is on the scene — himself."

"He knows about the murder and the bombings?"

"*Hai.* He said it was not surprising in light of the fact that cops, foreigners, and bearded wild men are involved."

"As far as I'm concerned, Toshihiko, Kishida is a jerk I've got to put up with until this job's done. Then we can forget about him."

"In that case, Sam," Ueki said, "hurry up and finish the job."

I pumped up my objectivity and went into the office with Tanaka and Kishida: personal feelings, so I've heard, have no place in business.

We pulled chairs up around Tanaka's desk and he asked if I knew the dangers—the accident variables—that are present in coal mining. I recited the statistics from the States: since 1900, more than one hundred thousand miners killed in accidents. And that didn't include the injured and disabled. Machines were the biggest threat: underground spaces are cramped and gloomy, and men laboring under constant tedium tend to get careless. After that, death came in the form of roof and wall failures, and gases and coal dust took the rest.

Kishida's recent hostility was no longer in evidence. "I gather that you understand the risks of explosions and underground fires?"

I thought I did. Methane occurs naturally as coal decays, and when it reaches concentrations of five to fifteen percent, it can explode violently. Then there was coal dust. In high concentrations, it, too, can explode, and it's doubly dangerous when mixed with methane.

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On top of that, coal dust causes serious respiratory problems if taken into the lungs over long periods of time.

"You have a good grasp of the basics," Tanaka said. "I have explained your proposals to Kishida-san before, but shall we review them once more?"

The heart of the system was an array of sensors to detect gas and dust concentrations, vibrations set up by shifting layers in the tunnel roofs and walls, stress factors at critical support points, carbon monoxide given off by machinery and blasting, and breaks in the lines transmitting electric power.

There were portable gas detectors that the miners carried with them, but malfunction was not unknown. Something as simple as a weak or dead battery could lead to disaster. The system I proposed would have a redundancy factor, constantly charging batteries patched into the underground power supply. If the line current were knocked out, the standby alarm systems would take over. Further, my system would automatically start air routing through the maze of pipes and tubes in the mine tunnels at the first sign of an accident, preventing or minimizing the loss of life that goes inevitably with long delays.

"Good!" Tanaka said. "Do you foresee any difficulty in integrating the safety system with the other computer fuctions I need?"

No. Tanaka wanted to be able to call up data instantly on daily production, manpower levels, payroll and equipment costs, tax, insurance, and other expenditures, and, additionally, figures on orders for shipments, destinations, and ship and train schedules.

"I am convinced," Tanaka said flatly.

Kishida balked. "These proposals might work, but I still do not believe that Mr. Brent knows how many things can go wrong in a mine. I wonder if all this gadgetry is any more effective than having men who realize the dangers because of practical experience?"

"One major accident," Tanaka snapped, "could cost us hundreds of millions of yen in survivor benefits alone. If we succeed in making the mine a model of efficiency, with reduced risks, we will be able to recoup expenses in a very short time."

"Risks!" Kishida snorted. "We would not be coal miners if we were not used to them."

Tanaka interlocked his fingers and let his hands rest on the top of the desk. "As president, Hideo, the final decision must be mine, and in our earlier discussions you did not raise so many objections."

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Kishida did not reply.

"Mr. Brent," Tanaka went on, "you will have to examine the mine in person to determine where the sensors will be placed. We will conclude the agreement, and then Hideo will take you down."

Kishida stomped out of the office, and Tanaka and I brought out our signets and began stamping papers. When the inking was done, Tanaka pulled out a drawer and removed bundles of currency—bundles that made a very respectable stack.

"We will work out the installation dates at a later time," he said, "but that should be fairly easy, as the computer modules are here already. Do you want to leave the money in the office until you are finished with the mine inspection?"

"Sure," I smiled. "I doubt if I'd find many places to spend it down there." I went outside, saw Kishida standing by a shed staring at Ueki, Goto, and Ito, and asked when he wanted to go.

"Soon. And bring your friends—even the Ainu. I will show you how brave men make a living."

I suppressed an urge to boot him in the rear.

The electric hoist was a barred cage that seemed to drop without end into the depths of the earth. At the bottom of the shaft, even the incandescent light bulbs strung from the roof were inadequate to dispel completely the pressing shadows. In addition to a subjective sense of the tremendous weight of rock and coal above and around us, there was the smell and taste of coal dust and the faint, ghostly stirrings of air from the huge exhaust fans thousands of feet above us.

And we were alone.

The second shift of miners was being held back until our tour was completed. There was a diesel train with short yellow cars near the lift, used to haul both coal and miners. Kishida got in behind the squat, powerful engine, and each of us took a separate car, hunkering down to stay clear of the roof.

Kishida eased back on the throttle and we were on our way. I couldn't judge distances accurately, but the main entries—long parallel tunnels cut through seams of coal—ran on for many kilometers. Every ten to fifteen meters, the miners had made other cuts through the tunnel walls at right angles, leaving massive square pillars of coal that helped support the overburden. I also knew that the roofs were drilled at regular intervals for the insertion of long metal bolts that were designed to stabilize the separate layers of rock above

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the mining area.

I imagined that someone standing at the surface—if his eyes could penetrate more than two kilometers of the planet's crust—would see ant-sized figures moving about through a honeycomb of petrified vegetation.

The engine light picked out a large piece of bright yellow machinery to one side of the track. "That," Kishida called back with a trace of pride in his voice, "is a continuous-mining gouger." Thick metal arms in front held out a series of heavy metal disks, each bearing a circle of spikes. There was an automatic scoop for loading coal into shuttle cars that could then carry it to the train as new corridors were dug.

A few seconds later, Kishida stopped the diesel. "This is where another main tunnel is being started. Get out and turn on your helmet lamps."

We patted our hats down firmly and followed instructions.

The train track ended about ten meters ahead of us at a metal barricade, and beyond that I saw the black, cavernous opening of the recently-started work site.

"Follow me." Kishida took the lead, walking rapidly in the converging cones of light from our helmets. The space we found ourselves in was about five meters wide and six long. When the miners resumed work, Kishida said, the gouging machine would expand the chamber rapidly, taking out eleven metric tons of coal a minute while conduits were laid down for electricity, air, and the water used to reduce dust levels by spraying. Within a few days, the room would become another tunnel, extended until the seam of coal was exhausted.

"Impressive," Inspector Ueki said.

Kishida proved that he was capable of smiling, even looking at Zenjiro Chihaya in a friendly way. "Well, Brent-san, now you have a three-dimensional perspective of mining. Do you still think . . ."

"What is that?" Zenjiro's voice rang out. "I hear someone out there in the tunnel."

We turned around, and the helmet lamps disclosed someone standing near the end of the train.

"Strange," Kishida muttered. "His light is not on, and no one is supposed to be down here alone. It is against company rules."

"I do not like this!" Inspector Ito said. He drew his gun and started out of the chamber, walking rapidly, then breaking into a run, calling out for the person in the tunnel to stand still.

Ito's command was ignored,

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and the figure squatted down, arms and hands in motion, seeking something I couldn't see. Ito fired several shots in rapid succession, and the distant form jerked with the impact, beginning a slow, forward tumble.

A painfully sharp percussion was followed by a burst of choking dust that seemed to fill the universe.

Then the mine fell in about us.

We were trapped, sealed in a pocket of coal that might turn into a tomb. Hideo Kishida, however, was the only one among us who was injured. I'm no physician, but I thought his ribs were cracked. Despite this, Kishida surprised me by putting on a face of optimism, doing his utmost to coach us in basic survival techniques, outlining the probable steps that would be taken to rescue us. Gone was the surly, irascible temperament that earlier had offended all of us. Our welfare now seemed to be his only concern.

We didn't know the identity of the person who had brought about our plight, or if Inspector Ito had lived through the blast and the cave-in. Of the former, there was no doubt that it was the same man who'd made the previous attempts; for Ito's safety, we could only hope.

Kishida asked the rest of us to turn off our lamps to conserve the batteries. "When my light becomes dim," he said, "you will have reserves." He also urged us to talk in subdued tones and to limit our movements about the chamber to prevent further collapse of the roof and walls near where the entrance used to be.

How, we asked, would help come to us, especially if Inspector Ito were dead or hurt? The train that brought us here, after all, presumably was buried under tons of debris.

Once it was obvious that our return was unreasonably overdue, Kishida said, the second shift of miners would notify Tanaka and begin to look for us. They could use the battery-powered handcars that were kept near each of the main entry shafts for emergencies and routine track inspections. And, he added, there was another train that could bring rescue teams in for most of the way from another tunnel. The teams could use shuttle cars to cross the trackless connecting corridors.

Ueki asked what would happen if a large part of the tunnel leading to our sealed chamber was now collapsed, but Kishida said that was unlikely. Not only was the roof bolted, but supporting timbers were used

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for additional stability. He surmised that the explosion was both premature, because of our stalker's detection by Zenjiro Chihaya, and limited in effect because of the safety factors.

Zenjiro removed his shirt, used his teeth to tear it into strips, and knotted several lengths together. "It will help if your chest is bound," he told Kishida.

When Zenjiro completed that task, he pulled off his soft headgear, placed it under Kishida's head, and started to move away.

"Wait, please, Chihaya . . . *san,*" Kishida said.

The Ainu crossed his arms over his bare chest. "Yes, Kishida-san?"

Kishida ran his hands over the makeshift bandaging. "I was rude to you earlier—to all of you. There are many worries on my mind, and I have had forebodings, but that is no excuse. You are a good man, and I am sorry to have brought any of you into this . . . this difficulty."

Zenjiro bowed his head and smiled.

That, I thought, was a fair start on reconciling differences, only I hoped it wasn't a beginning that came at the end. Then I began to wonder if I should mention a new worry. Masahige Goto beat me to it.

"Kishida-san," he asked, "how long will the air last here?"

"Not very long in a space this small," the answer came, "and when it becomes too bad, we will have to use our emergency breathing packs. That will give us another few hours."

There were an infinite number of ways for death to come, I supposed, but slow asphyxiation seemed more terrifying than most to contemplate.

We talked then about our lives, our experiences, trying unconsciously, I think, to find courage in the unity of shared memories.

Goto reminisced about long, laborious days in college, striving to keep up with his fellows, always champing at the bit, feeling that he was constrained, yoked to a future of ledgers, columns of figures, mountains of paper to be filed. His dream was to fly, to soar above the mundane, to find release in clean sapphire skies, looking down, godlike, on paddies, rivers, and towns, free . . . free. Every yen he could save, each moment he could spare from his studies, went to books about aviation, aircraft, the history of human flight.

Then work. Each day, work. Mornings commencing with a company song, Zen discipline clearing mind of all thoughts save those of his job, body and mind geared solely to the task before him.

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Then the favoring smile of good fortune, another job, a daring move from one company to another, an employer who understood, who encouraged the aspiration to fly. Lessons, the tension of the solo flight, the exhilaration of being in control—and the dawning knowledge that achievement of this goal allowed him to go back to his desk and the papers and the ink with renewed energy, spiritually free even when earthbound by everyday necessity.

Death? *Hai,* there is fear—the fear of flying alone for the first time, of facing an unknown, but there is also the sustaining memory of having done, of achieving—of having *been.*

I, too, know this feeling of *being* (said Zenjiro), but in a different way, a simple way you would say, but the *only* way I care to know. Of belonging and achieving? No, it was different for me. No travel, no university, no promise of riches and prestige. But, then, what are such things to me? In high school, I learned of other peoples across the seas, of empires and conquerors that are now dust, of worlds that circle the great light of the sun, of evil uses of unbelievable forces, of mighty nations ever poised for battle, hating, fearing, destroying. And I am saddened.

Saddened that so many do not see the earth and know that it lives, and can die, and suffers torments inflicted by uncaring people, its skin ripped for the fat underneath, its dark blood drawn for power, the iron and mineral of its bone scooped away, its breathing robe of creatures and plants poisoned, its breath fouled by careless wastes. This is how I see—how I *know*—the world, and if I die, it is one more death, only one more. My people die. The bear dies. Yet, if only . . . if somehow . . .

The sea. The sea is what I remember best, Kishida said. Sometimes peaceful, sometimes wrathful, it was the sight and the sound and the smell of the sea that surrounded me. As a child, laughing when playful waters licked at wiggling toes on the beach, crying when salt stung my eyes, huddling next to my mother when storm-driven waves crashed insanely against the jetties.

Men fished, some like my father, others . . . different. They were different, unlike us, my father said, men of the wilds with fearsome bearded faces, and he was a good father, and I loved him, learning at his knee what was wrong as well as right. Both kinds of men put to sea in their boats, taking the food we needed, some prospering, some not, others dying in

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storm and mishap. And many, though living, still did not return, taken prisoner by the men who worship the red flag, chained in Siberian prisons for something called violation of territorial limits. I learned hate then, hatred of those who took people like my father, hatred for anything from the outside . . . outside our town, outside our home. Anything.

But we learn. The outside is part of me, too, good and bad, and I cannot hide from it, or myself. Death? *Hai,* I am afraid, but cannot all fear—like hatred—be vanquished? I will try. I want to live.

As a boy, Toshihiko Ueki said, I saw what I never want other children to witness—the suffering and destruction of war. Thin contrails etched on blue as silver engines of war flew high above on daily missions to shatter cities. Fear and hunger in those last days before all of mankind lurched from one epoch to the next through the twin gates of hell, Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Then, one day, a foreign soldier stopping in a muddy lane, looking at a skinny boy with compassion, bowing in the Japanese way, holding out chocolate and encouraging until it was accepted. He came to know the boy, seeing him often, going with him, finally, to his parents' home, taking food and gifts, making it seem that it was *his* privilege to be under *their* roof. When it was time for him to return to his own country, he saw the boy once more, hugging him tightly. Goodbye, son. Good luck. Sayonara.

I always remembered that, Ueki said, smiling. Good luck. And *son.* So quickly, then, the years spinning by, bringing new hopes, new visions, wondrous achievements.

Always, the policeman said, I believe in hope. Then, and now, and if it is my time to die, I will die with hope.

The light from Kishida's lamp was weakening, downshifting in energy to an amber that gave eyes a chatoyant glow—eyes that were on me, patient, curious, polite even in worry, wondering what this man from another country thought and felt under the reaper's hovering scythe. That I was afraid, yes, and sorry for words unsaid or spoken in anger, of thoughtless and selfish actions. Sorry also that I hadn't spun more dreams, chased more rainbows, shared more laughter, and—lived forever with the ones I loved.

Not profound, I know, but there are only a few certainties for me: love is in thought and deed, not words, good is constructive, evil destructive, and the purpose of life—living.

Then I lowered my head and

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thought of Noriko and of my two sons.

Zenjiro broke the stillness with a startling observation. "The air is still good, Kishida-san. Why is that? And what is that sound?"

I strained to hear, but it was a while before I could make out a faint clinking of metal which gradually became louder.

"The rescue team is here!" Kishida confirmed. "Move to the back wall of the chamber, please."

In minutes, a bright slit of yellow light appeared at the top of the blocked entrance, followed by a miner's shouted voice. "Are you all right in there?"

"Yes!" Kishida yelled. "But please hurry. We want a hot bath."

I thought I could hear cheering through the narrow, unnoticed opening that had let precious air in throughout our long ordeal.

While the company doctor taped Kishida's ribs, Inspector Ito took us to a body lying across the plunger of an electric detonator. Ueki turned the head into the light. It was Takashi Tanaka, son of the coal mine president, the man of few words we had met briefly the night before.

"But why?" I asked, confused. "And how the heck did he get here?"

"The *how* of it is easy enough," Ito said. "As a mining engineer, Takashi was down here frequently. I think he probably came in with the first shift. When it was finished, all he had to do was slip into a nearby tunnel when the miners left on the train, knowing Kishida would bring you to the new work site. With so many men on each shift, no one would have noticed. He was probably going to take a shuttle car back after we were buried."

"I do not believe you have been idle for all the hours since your own rescue, Ito-san," Inspector Ueki said. "Have you made any progress with discovering motive?"

"Takashi certainly was not working alone," Ito said grimly. "His accomplice has locked himself in the office with a shotgun."

"I think I know," Kishida said, walking over to us stiffly. "In my heart, I have suspected since the moment I learned of the previous incidents." He lowered his voice. "Itaru Tanaka, Takashi's father, must be involved."

"It appears to be that way," Ito said. "Whatever you can tell us will help, Kishida-san, but first let us get out of here."

I took a lingering look at the

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incline of fallen rocks and coal that still blocked part of the entrance to the chamber.

We rode the slow handcars to the hoist.

It was night, an attenuated layer of silvery cloud scudding across a crescent of new moon. The office building was illuminated by the headlights of police cars parked at a distance, and uniformed men with weapons crouched behind them.

We remained by the shaft entrance while Ito went to talk to the officers. When he came back, he said that Tanaka was still refusing to answer the office telephone or to respond to demands to come out made over bullhorns.

"We want to take him alive," Ito said, "but if he does not surrender soon, we will have to enter in force."

Shotguns, unlike handguns, may be owned legally by licensed hunters in Japan, but I doubted if that made much difference to the law officers faced with the prospect of a shoot-out.

Inspector Ueki rubbed at the coal dust on his face with a handkerchief. "Does Tanaka know of his son's death?"

"No one told him," Ito said, "but he was watching when I was brought out and immediately turned and ran for the building."

"Yes," Ueki said thoughtfully, "Tanaka could make several assumptions—that the murderous plans had somehow gone awry, or that Takashi was injured, dead, a prisoner, or a fugitive, seeking to hide himself in the maze of tunnels."

"Kishida-san," Inspector Ito said, "before we came out, you remarked that you suspected that Tanaka and his son were in this together. Would you mind telling us why?"

Years ago, Kishida answered, Itaru Tanaka launched the coal mining venture with great expectations but inadequate financing. He went to his boyhood friend, Hideo Kishida, asking for help. Kishida did not hesitate. His business as a ship chandler in a provincial seaport was doing well, and he sold it at a decent profit, turning the money over to Tanaka and receiving a junior partnership with the understanding that he and Takashi, still an infant then, would have equal shares in profits and management someday.

However, Kishida continued, Itaru and Takashi had come to resent him in later years, becoming increasingly resentful of his presence, trying to push him into the background of decision-making, demeaning his contributions, past and present.

Inspector Ito's lips curled down in disgust. "When Tanaka needed you, you were

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family, but when his son grew up, you became an obstacle, blocking exclusive Tanaka control of the company."

"Despicable," Ueki agreed, "but the motive remains unclear. Kishida's death would have given the Tanakas free rein, but what of the efforts to do the rest of us harm earlier?"

"Inspector Ueki, Inspector Ito," Kishida said, "I cannot answer that fully, but I believe that Itaru and Takashi were heavily in debt."

Ueki lighted a cigarette, shielding the lighter flame from the breeze in cupped hands. "What kind of debts?"

"Gambling," Kishida said. "They always bet large amounts on the horse races, were fond of dice and cards, and spent much time together in Hakodate and Sapporo with various women, often days at a time."

I kicked at a clump of dirt. In every part of the world, there were men who thought that the good life consists of well-kept mistresses and places where they can boast of high status by lavish expenditures for food, drink, and wagering.

Yet—what the heck did their spendthrift habits have to do with all of this? Just as I was about to understand, I thought, Zenjiro's voice popped me back into the shady zones of uncertainty.

"There is an open window at the side of the office building." Zenjiro was off like an arrow, past the cruisers, pulling himself over a sill and disappearing inside.

At the rim of my vision, I saw a bolide burn a green wake across a clearing in the thin clouds, followed by two booms: one, distant and dull, from the exploding meteorite, the other thundering from the office building.

The men in uniform stirred uneasily as the front door began to swing outward. "Hold your fire!" Inspector Ueki shouted.

Zenjiro Chihaya emerged into the light, holding a shotgun high in one hand. As he came down the steps, he dragged the limp form of Itaru Tanaka behind him.

Tanaka didn't have an out. With his son dead, there was no one to shoulder the blame or the consequences, which Takashi might have been expected to do out of filial loyalty. Until he learned of Takashi's death, Tanaka remained defiant, prepared to preserve face by fighting to the last. And he might have done it if Zenjiro hadn't crept into his office unseen and unheard until all Tanaka could manage before he was disarmed was a futile shotgun blast into the ceiling.

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Now, handcuffed and surrounded by cops, he was broken, indifferent to his own plight and to the future welfare of wife, daughter, and employees. He didn't try to hold anything back.

The Tanakas needed large sums of cash to cover private debts, and siphoned yen out of the company till until it was almost depleted, juggling figures and dissembling to hide it from Kishida. One way to remedy this, they thought, was to secure bank loans.

So they retained me, took my preliminary cost estimate to the banks, and borrowed enough to implement a safety and efficiency program. Their intent, however, was to divert those funds into the hands of some ungentlemanly *yakuza* mobsters who were making threats about collecting on private notes that carried steep interest rates. But if they tried to back away from the computerization project, they feared that Kishida —opposed to the large expenditure in the first place—would get suspicious about the sudden change of heart and demand an audit.

Ergo, provide an airtight excuse for not shelling out the money—get rid of Sam Brent. With me dead, they'd have a plausible reason for holding up on the mine improvements until they could bring in other firms for their estimates. They hoped to pay off the loan sharks and gamblers, holding the banks at bay until they got lucky with the thoroughbred races, which are legal, and the cards and dice, which aren't.

The Tanakas knew our travel plans in detail, and Takashi, who was familiar with explosives, went to Okayama and put the bomb on the rental airplane. He then returned to Sapporo on a commercial flight to await further instructions from his father. When I called Itaru Tanaka from the hotel and unwittingly left a message that provided our location, along with the obvious fact that we were still alive, another opportunity presented itself. Takashi, as a mining engineer, had no trouble obtaining more explosives —this time to get rid of the computers. They would do anything to delay my arrival at the mine until either I chickened out or they found a way to pick me off when I was a sure target. The illness of Tanaka's daughter, which was real, offered them that much more justification for postponing our meeting.

After the failed attempt at the hotel, Takashi kept an eye on us, mingling with other people in the lobby as police and hotel officials flocked around us with their preliminary questions before Inspector Ito arrived. In the morning, Takashi

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watched as we made arrangements at the travel desk. As soon as we left, he identified himself as a late-arriving friend of mine, and the travel agent obligingly gave our destination.

Takashi followed on the next train.

The portion of Tanaka's confession that disgusted me most was the disclosure that Takashi had no intention of going for me at the lake, of risking capture or making his face known with so many tourists around for the festival. He tortured and killed the hotel clerk after he deliberately aroused the man's suspicions, waiting until he was sure that we'd been warned before strangling the old man. He counted on the sheer brutality of the action to frighten us away.

The grand finale, of course, after the other failures, was to wait for Kishida to return from a legitimate business trip and send the two of us down into the mine after concluding the deal for the computers. Takashi planned what was going to be passed off as one of those accidental mine explosions, placing the charges so the cave-in would take out a lot of expensive, insured equipment, too. His plan called for catching us in an open part of the tunnel instead of that small but stable recess. It was spoiled because of the unexpected presence of other people, including Zenjiro, who heard him as he skulked about in the darkness, and Inspector Ito, whose bullets sent him toppling over the detonator. Ito, fortunately, was well away from the section of roof that crashed down, and had the presence of mind to wait where he was until the miners came to see what was wrong.

"It was a vulpine scheme, actually," Inspector Ueki remarked, "as clever as it was evil."

"What makes you say that?" Goto asked.

"Kishida-san would have been out of the way, and the Tanakas could have reaped the insurance benefits for the heavy equipment that was damaged or ruined. And they also would have had Sam's money, the computers, and the rest of the funds obtained from the banks."

Now I understood the cunning behind Tanaka's asking whether I wanted to leave my bundles of yen, the payment for the computer system, in his office while I went to inspect the mine.

I picked up the stamped sales agreement and receipt and held them in my hands. "Kishida-san, you were opposed to my system, and I'll consider the deal void if you wish."

He took the papers from me, grinned, and tore them into

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small pieces, which he dropped in Tanaka's lap. "I objected only because I was suspicious of everyone and everything." He averted his eyes as Tanaka was led away. "We will conclude a new agreement, one bearing *my* name, and I will expect you to come back—often—to see that everything is working well."

Goto took charge of the currency and Inspector Ito observed that it was late. "I will take our visitors to Hokkaido back to Sapporo in the morning after leaving Zenjiro at his *kotan*. Shall we look for a hotel?"

"If you do not mind the chaos of a bachelor's home," Kishida offered, "it would please me to have you as my guests. There is a noodle shop near my house which is still open, and," he glanced at Zenjiro, "I have several bottles of sweet white sake."

The craggy Viking face split into a toothy grin.

We stood by Inspector Ito's car in the freshness of the new day and Kishida took Zenjiro aside. We weren't trying to eavesdrop, but the words came to us clearly.

Now that the Tanakas were gone, Kishida said, he was going to work hard to put the mine back on solid footing. In time, it would prosper and grow, and he was going to need someone he trusted and liked to help direct the expanding operations — someone who also might want to assist in another project, a bear farm where cubs could be raised in a protected environment and then released in their natural habitat when mature. To do this would require people familiar with the bear.

Would Zenjiro Chihaya be interested?

As the two men bowed low to each other, I saw a large white cloud drifting over a mountain peak, and recalled boyhood days when I would lie in fragrant green grass and let my imagination sculpt shapes in the puffy masses above.

The figure I was watching now reared up on its hind legs and opened its mouth in a silent roar of triumph, majestic and free, changing shape slowly in the shifting currents of wind, but unaltered in its essence.

Ueki, Goto, and Inspector Ito were looking up, too.

I think we all saw the same thing.

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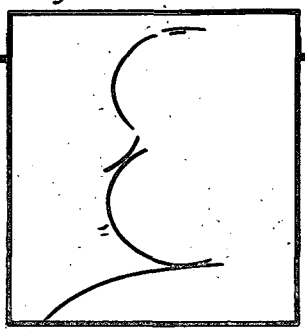
Computer whiz David Lightman (Matthew Broderick) demonstrates his machinery for his classmate Jennifer (Ally Sheedy) in *WarGames*.

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MURDER BY DIRECTION

by Peter Shaw



Could a seventeen-year-old high school kid break the national defense code, nearly start a nuclear war, and then prove to be the only person in the country able to countermand a set of locked-in, computerized missile launch orders? If not, then just how much are our video-game playing, computer whiz teenagers capable of doing from behind the locked doors of their rooms? **WarGames** doesn't really give us the answers to these questions, but just follow the young computer detective, David Lightman, through the steps necessary to break the launch codes and thereby save the world. To do so is to experience the fantasy of power through electronics that presently grips adults and teenagers alike.

It's all done with a home computer and a "modem," the device that can connect any home in America to national and international computer nets through telephone lines. David Lightman can dial publicly available numbers on his phone, place the headset in the cradle of the modem, and then—if he can guess or be tipped off about the right code words—he can issue commands to his school's computer to change his grades, or to an airline to reserve tickets for him on a flight to Paris. One day David tries to guess the code that will enable him to play, free of charge, what looks like a new set of computer games available over the phone wires. But the "games" turn out to include the North American missile command's simulated nuclear "war games"—the computer scenarios provided to the President and the Joint Chiefs of Staff to show the current re-

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sults of a nuclear exchange with the Russians.

Not yet realizing what he has stumbled onto, David works at getting the machine to play "Thermonuclear War" with him. When he succeeds, and then chooses to play as "Russia," his moves are beamed to the Defense Command's computers. The United States goes on a real war alert, and a countdown to nuclear Armageddon begins. At this point it's too late to call off the "game," for like Hal in the movie *2001,* the computer has gone haywire.

The runaway computer has a mad scientist to go with it. But what makes *WarGames* interesting is the emphasis on what a youthful detective must do to find the scientist. The clues turn up in the school library, where David, labeled an "underachiever" by his teachers, obviously spends little time in the normal course of events. His computer has made him into a loner, but now it is bringing him back into the world. Best of all, it turns up his lovely classmate Jennifer, who is fascinated by his skills. Their romance is handled with charm.

Computer detective work, it's a relief to report, proves not very different from the old fashioned kind. David traces the unusually titled games he has stumbled across to their inventor, a certain Dr. Falken. He then reads up on Falken for clues to what kind of secret password he would have been likely to choose. Inventors of computer programs, it seems, sometimes leave a password known only to themselves for instant "back door" access to their highly classified, supposedly tamper-proof programs. Once inside the program, and having triggered the nuclear countdown, David has to imagine what it would take to get a halt order through to a runaway thinking machine created by Falken. It isn't really giving away the plot to reveal that the solution involves taking on the machine in a computer game contest.

John Wood, who plays the dangerous Dr. Falken, has to play both mad scientist and farseeing prophet of nuclear destruction. The two sides of him don't quite fit together, and neither do the movie's somewhat contradictory messages. On the one hand we are being urged to rely on people, not computers. But on the other hand Falken's programming of his computer to bring on a nuclear war makes the point that people are not always reliable, either. But never mind the logic. Everyone's heart is in the right place, and in the end we leave both computers and people functioning together safely and efficiently.

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FRAMES OF REFERENCE

by Peter Christian



The wheels spin, the locomotive chugs and whistles, and Alfred Hitchcock's *The Lady Vanishes* pulls into a permanent siding in our collective memory of great screen mysteries. The images are lasting: Miss Froy drawing her name with a finger across the steam condensing on the inside of her compartment window; elephantine folk dancers stomping in the third-class corridor; a claustrophobic fight amid the magician's crates of props in the baggage compartment; above all, the distant train crossing a viaduct against a Middle European landscape (actually, the mountains of Wales). For audiences, *The Lady Vanishes* (1938) was a breathtaking voyage of discovery—the classic train thriller.

But it was far from being the only mystery film set on a **train.** Indeed, the very first story-line movie, *The Great Train Robbery* of 1903, deals in its brief length with a foiled holdup on a moving mail train. And other directors before Hitchcock had seen the virtues of train settings, especially with the coming of sound to the screen. Murder and the tension of locomotive clatter mingled, for instance, in *Mystery Train* (1931). The sense of speed and movement had also added excitement: in 1933's unusual *Silk Express,* a shipment of costly Japanese silk must be transported by train from Seattle to New York in seventy-two hours, and a criminal gang is determined to destroy or delay the express. They start with two murders on board, and the weapon is an icicle.

Directors before Hitchcock had also seen the wisdom of coupling

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international intrigue to train stories. A motley assortment of passengers—including Marlene Dietrich and Anna May Wong—find themselves rebel hostages while travelling on the *Shanghai Express* (1931). In *Orient Express,* the Graham Greene novel somewhat changed for the screen in 1934, the hero, journeying to Istanbul, falls in love with a dancer, only to realize her companion is a Communist agent. *Bombay Mail* (1934), from a Lawrence G. Blochman story, tickets all sorts of strange fares: a maharajah is shot by an unknown assassin on the train from Calcutta, and a deadly cobra slithers through the corridors.

As soon as war clouds began gathering in Europe, Eurorail became thick with spies. Carol Reed's 1940 *Night Train to Munich* has Rex Harrison help a scientist's daughter save some valuable papers from the Nazis, but the journey seems very similar in spirit to the earlier Hitchcock film. The same actress—Margaret Lockwood—played the heroine, and the same pair of British comedians portrayed bungling fellow-travellers.

The movies were always looking for ways to book murder and robbery aboard speeding trains. In *Midnight Limited* (1940), an ingenious criminal has himself shipped inside a coffin in the baggage section of a mail train in order to loot at leisure between stops. In the Sherlock Holmes adventure *Terror by Night* (1946), Basil Rathbone foils a jewel thief employing a similar scheme on a rail trip to Scotland.

Sometimes trains disappear. Conan Doyle's *The Lost Special,* with all new characters, became an American serial in 1932 (and several features as well): a train carrying gold shipments from a mine vanishes. *The Ghost Train* (1933) is eerily heard in the night but never seen. *The Phantom Train* (1933) roars down the tracks to cause derailings and crashes. John Wayne in the serial *Hurricane Express* (1933) grapples with the mysterious Wrecker, determined to destroy a train line.

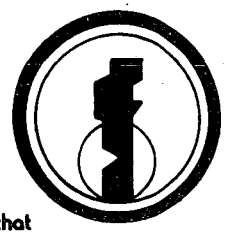
Perhaps because of the decline in rail travel, train mysteries have become less frequent—although the celebrated *Murder on the Orient Express* (1974) may yet bring back that elegant mystery mode. In real life, the Orient Express has revived its route again, with appropriate atmosphere. And in this country, on the East Coast, the Mystery Express has already completed some two-day trips on nostalgic old trains with famous mystery authors and a staged murder to solve on board. Such enthusiasm is an all-clear signal that the mystery-train drama has not had its last stop.

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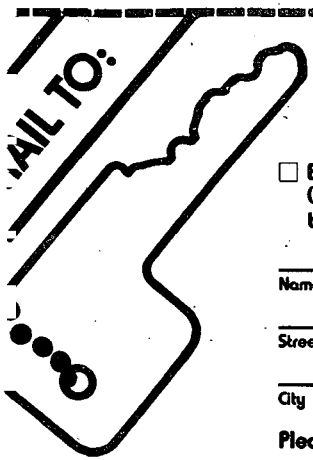
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UNSOLVED

by

George J. Summers

Unsolved at present, that is, but can you work it out?

The answer will appear in the Mid-September issue.

Three women, named Anna, Babs, and Cora, were questioned about the murder of Dana. One of the three women committed the murder, the second was an accomplice in the murder, and the third was innocent of any involvement in the murder.

Each of the following three statements was made by one of the three women:

1. Anna is not the accomplice.
2. Babs is not the murderess.
3. Cora is not the innocent one.

I. Each statement refers to a woman other than the speaker.

II. The innocent woman made at least one of these statements.

III. Only the innocent woman told the truth.

Which one of the three women was the murderess?

"The Murderess," taken from New Puzzles in Logical Deduction *by George J. Summers, copyright © 1968 by George J. Summers, Dover Publications, N.Y., N.Y.*

See page 153 for the solution to the August puzzle.

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FICTION

The Hobby Fair Mystery

by Ingram Meyer



Pixy didn't especially enjoy driving his business partner, commonly known only by the name of Grandma, and her girlfriends up to the lodge, but he needed the little company car later on for his date with Tiffy, his newest girlfriend. Grandma was sitting beside him, while Katie Globeflower, Sophie Carlton, and Young Shirley—Shirley being only fifty-five—were squished into the back seat of their old beetle Volkswagen.

"I wonder if the people from last year will be there again," said Grandma. "It was the best convention ever at Gully Lodge. Except for The Other Thing." Her friends nodded their heads in agreement.

Pixy thought of Gully Lodge as sort of a summer camp for old folks, although they called their annual meeting in the mountains a convention. The conventioneers, hundreds of them it seemed, brought their hobby collections to it—dolls,

Illustration by Hank Blaustein

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buttons, stamps, homemade stationery, ceramic owls, souvenir spoons, you name it and it was there—put them on display in the big hall, and assembled in little groups. They spent most of the time renewing old friendships. Many of the conventioneers, like Grandma and her three girlfriends, had come there for the past half dozen years.

"I still wonder what did happen to that stamp collector last summer. Arthur White, I think his name was. Did anybody hear if he was ever found?" asked Katie Globeflower.

"The last I heard about it was that they thought he got lost on purpose. Ran away," said Young Shirley.

"And left his suitcase and clothes behind?" Sophie Carlton shook her head. "No, take my word for it, the man drowned in the river. Body got swept down to the coast and out into the ocean."

Grandma and Pixy just looked at each other. They were licensed private detectives and had been very interested in the unfortunate disappearance, but the proprietor of the lodge had not wanted to hire them. Had, in fact, sneered at their occupation. Grandma and Pixy had snooped around anyhow. And after two days of unfruitful investigating they had reluctantly given up. The case of the missing conventioneer of Gully Lodge was one of their few failures. It had been a blow to their egos, so they were convinced the disappearance would remain a mystery. It would serve that sarcastic lodge owner just right.

And now they were on their way to the lodge once again, but only for pleasure. Pixy, who had stayed at the lodge last year for the first and last time, having sold his Indian arrowhead collection in the meantime, was humming a little tune, a love song, in anticipation of tonight's date.

The road was getting quite steep, and Pixy shifted down into second gear. The poor little Volkswagen had a heavy load, with four not exactly skinny ladies to transport up into the mountains. Pixy, a slight man, weighing no more than a hundred thirty-five or so pounds these days, felt almost out of place. He took a quick look into the rear view mirror. Hm—he mightn't be tall and muscular, but he sure as hell was a handsome little devil. Dark brown wavy hair, year-round tan, and those twinkling charcoal-colored eyes. On the whole, Pixy didn't have much to complain about. Not too many of his friends knew about the elevator shoes, of course.

"A vain little person, isn't he?" he heard Young Shirley

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whisper from the back seat, and Pixy blushed. Well, *she* was a preener herself. In the rear view mirror he could just see the top of her head, the obviously dyed auburn ringlets hiding most of a smart little white velvet hat. Not a bad-looking old bag actually, he thought. Not like the other two beside her. Katie sported a tight sort of topknot, held by a glittering comb thing, and Sophie still wore her carrotty dyed hair the way it had been back in the thirties and forties when she'd been an actress. Pixy started, mentally, to hum a little Broadway tune.

Grandma, beside him, was unusually quiet on this two-hour drive. Maybe she felt guilty for having the "good" seat, while her dear friends were all scrunched up in the back? Groaning and sighing could be heard from time to time from behind. He hoped he wouldn't get the giggles, for Pixy's sense of humor left a little to be desired now and then.

"Thinking about the mystery up at the lodge?" he asked his partner.

"Yeah. Damndest thing we ever came up against, Pixy. One minute the man was sitting on a bench in front of the main building, and the next he was gone. Maybe something new did turn up about him. I'll have to talk again to a few of the people from last summer. Sure you can't stay for a couple of days?"

"No! Me and three hundred funny collectors? Once was enough for me. Besides, I invited Tiffy out for dinner."

"Not HER again! Pixy, she's not your type."

"Please, Gran, don't start that." Heck, didn't his partner ever keep her nose out of his private life? Maybe he should move to the other side of town. Having his house right next door to hers gave him practically no privacy at all. Grandma considered herself a leader, and lead—boss around—everybody around her she did. He glanced at her. She was smart looking as ever, he had to admit that. Loden-green tweed suit, with multicolored pinstriped blouse, her gold brooch at her throat, her silver hair piled especially high on her head today and held there with a little mother-of-pearl clip, and gold hoops in her ears. What surprised Pixy most of all were her shoes, for his partner actually wore a pair of three-inch heels and not her usual sneakers. Cripes, that would bring her up to six feet, and he, short as he was, had better not walk right beside her. She might trample on him by mistake. He grinned. No, not Grandma, for basically she had a heart of gold, and Pixy knew she thought of him more as a

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son than a partner.

They pulled up in front of the lodge. It was a nice lodge, a cosy place to look at. The main building, a reddish-brown cedar structure, had been designed from the start to have a comfortable, quaint look. Now, seventy-five years later, it was truly rustic, and the new hotel a few miles farther along the highway took most of the tourist business. The hobby fair was held each year at Gully Lodge, though, as most of the participants were older people who delighted in this old fashioned place.

On either side of the main building were half a dozen matching motel units, complete with kitchenettes, fireplaces and carports. Grandma's girlfriends had rented such a cottage, but she herself had asked for a reservation in a comfortable single room in the lodge. She preferred privacy, especially in the mornings when she put on her face. If Pixy was vain, well, so was she.

Pixy stopped the car at the curb in front of the lodge and slid from behind the steering wheel. He helped the ladies out and started to take the suitcases off the roof rack. Katie Globeflower's was jammed under one of the tubular steel bars, and when he pulled on it, it snapped open. Three thousand buttons spilled down the sides of the beetle car and rolled all over the asphalt road and parking lot, underneath other cars. Some even made it to the edge of the mountain and disappeared down into the creek. The ladies shrieked and hopped around, Katie Globeflower crawling on all fours in all directions at once, it seemed, like a great big berserk turtle as she sobbed loudly, "My buttons! I lost all my buttons!"

And Pixy—Grandma never forgave him for this—started to laugh. He laughed so hard he finally had to hide behind a bush, where he doubled over and could hardly catch his breath.

Word had gotten out quickly about the unspeakable misfortune of one of their fellow conventioneers, and now a couple of hundred well-dressed ladies and gentlemen were helping poor Katie pick up buttons. With much yahooing, they did find over two thousand of them, and Katie was somewhat mollified. She hadn't got that much attention since the day she fell overboard from the cruise ship on her honeymoon back in 1937.

With most of the conventioneers out in the parking lot, Pixy decided to have a quick look around the big exhibition hall. He remembered the lay-

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out of the lodge pretty well from before. This year things were no different inside the big room from the setup at last year's hobby fair. There were rows and rows of long narrow tables, each filled with collector's items. Some were really quite nice and interesting, and some were . . . well, unusual. Beer bottle caps? Matchbook covers? Stuffed birds? Pixy sure hoped his partner wouldn't pick a fight with the owner of the latter, for Grandma was crazy about animals.

One by one the conventioneers were trickling back into the hall. Grandma had come inside, too, and she motioned to Pixy to come over.

"Come along to my room," she whispered. "I have to talk to you."

Pixy felt a little uncomfortable. Was she going to give him heck for the thing with the buttons? It wasn't *his* fault that Katie Globeflower hadn't locked her suitcase properly. But Grandma didn't mention the parking lot incident. Instead, after she had closed the door to her room behind them, she said, "Listen, Pixy. I think Young Shirley has disappeared."

"What? Oh come on, Gran, with all these people milling around here, how can you say such a thing?"

"Well, when everybody had left the parking lot after the little occurrence—" and here Grandma scowled "—there stood Young Shirley's suitcase and overnight bag. So I carried them to the little cottage she was to share with Katie and Sophie—they are a little cheap, you know—and she wasn't there, either. Nobody seems to have seen Young Shirley since we stepped out of the car, Pixy."

"I saw her after that, Gran. After picking up two or three buttons, she sneaked off over to that bench by the entrance and plopped herself down. Not much of a friend, is she?"

"See who's talking!" snapped Grandma. Pixy sighed. Yes, he too had steered clear of picking up those stupid buttons.

He said, "I wouldn't worry too much about good ol' Shirley, Gran. She'll show up for the next meal. Maybe she's having herself a little snack right now. Man, she ain't exactly skinny, is she? Did you have a look in the cafe yet?"

"Sure. That's the first place I went."

By dinnertime word had spread through the entire convention about Young Shirley's disappearance. The police had come and gone, and a rescue team had arrived. It was combing the mountainous area around the lodge. Grandma and Pixy sat in lawn chairs behind the main building. They were the only people who dared to be

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outside after the second disappearance from the lodge.

"Several cars have left," said Grandma mournfully. "Some of the ladies are beginning to think this place is—well, haunted."

Haunted! Pixy had thought more along the lines of Shirley's falling into the creek. Toppling over that funny cliff. Drowning in the river. But a ghost at Gully Lodge. Man, he hoped not! For Pixy believed with all his heart in the supernatural. There are places on this earth that are occupied by honest-to-goodness ghosts, and this place could easily be one of them. The setting was right for it.

"And now," said Grandma, "you will drive back home and take that awful Tiffy out on a date, and I, a lonely old woman—" she sniffled pathetically "—have to try to find one of my dearest friends in the whole world all by myself."

"Stop it!" Pixy jumped up. "You know damn well I wouldn't take off now. But I'll tell you one thing, Gran. I know you don't care for my new girlfriend, but *I* like Tiffy, and I won't believe what you told me she did for a living before she met me. Tiffy is a nice sweet young lady. She's like—like a fragile little flower, Gran, with a pure and innocent mind. Comes from a nice family back in the Midwest."

Pixy was steaming.

"Yes, Pixy," said Grandma quietly. "Maybe I was wrong about her after all."

Pixy looked suspiciously at her. Grandma never gave in like that. She really must be awfully upset and worried that something terrible had happened to her friend. He had better stay here with her. Tiffy would understand.

"I couldn't really leave now," he said. And it was a good thing that Grandma just then had to blow her nose, and her young partner couldn't see the funny gleam in her eyes.

They did not ask the owner of Gully Lodge to give them another crack at solving a mystery. In fact, with all the commotion, he didn't even know that the detectives were among his guests. And that was, in a way, a very good thing because Grandma fixed her partner a nice and comfortable bed in the bathtub of her suite. Why pay for extra accommodations?

The following morning Grandma took her thimble collection to be displayed in the big hall, then joined a group of fellow conventioneers for calisthenics in a small enclosed courtyard between the main building and the tennis court.

Pixy had phoned Tiffy the night before to explain why he

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wouldn't be able to keep their date, and she, sweet thing, had said she understood and not to worry about it. Then, when he wanted to say good night to her around ten o'clock, she hadn't answered her phone. He had let it ring at least a dozen times without success. Oh well, maybe she'd been in the shower.

And the mountain rescue team had not found Young Shirley. It was now commonly believed that she had taken a bus from the bus stop up by the highway, having to leave for some reason or other and not wanting to bother her friends about transportation. The only ones who would not, could not, believe the woman would pull such a stunt were Grandma and Pixy. So Pixy snooped about all morning by himself, while his partner quietly questioned quite a few of her fellow conventioneers during hobby demonstrations and a workshop. She really was ticked off that her friends, Katie Globeflower and Sophie Carlton, didn't seem especially worried about poor Young Shirley. They actually believed she'd taken off of her own free will.

They were sitting in the cafeteria for a little afternoon snack, Grandma with two big pieces of apple pie á la mode, a butterhorn, and tea, Pixy with a doughnut and coffee, when Grandma remarked, "Somehow this convention isn't much fun this year, Pixy. Just a bunch of us old folks playing around with stamps and buttons, dolls and what-have-you. And there's a horrible person with a couple of dozen stuffed birds, for goodness sake. The unspeakable ghastliness! I'm seriously considering selling my thimbles and finding myself a more exciting hobby—like raising show cats, or wind surfing. This lodge, Gully Lodge, doesn't look so pretty any more, either. It's getting rundown. And these mountains depress me. I'm really becoming more of a coast person, I think."

"Oh Gran, this doesn't sound at all like you!" Pixy patted her arm. "You've been looking forward to this little vacation for weeks. Come on, let's go for a nice walk." Oh man, he hoped Grandma wasn't getting ill. He had never seen her so miserable.

Dully, Grandma said, "What we should do now, Pixy, is sit down on that bench by the lodge entrance and think. Last year that stamp collector, Arthur White, was last seen sitting there. And now poor Shirl was also last seen there—by you."

"It does sound strange. Let's go over there and see what happens."

The bench was the same color as the lodge, and it seemed to be attached to the wall, right

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under a narrow window. The detectives sat down and looked around. They looked at the fairly large paved car park, and at cedars and pines growing up the slope of a long, gently rising hill. To the right of the lodge, perhaps five hundred yards away, rose a sheer cliff. It came to a peak on top and vaguely resembled a grey pyramid. To their left was the four-lane highway, with enormous snow-topped mountains behind it.

Grandma and Pixy carefully scanned the view from their observation point. The sun stood high over the long hill in front of them, and it took a while for the detectives to get used to the glare. Then—they both saw it at the same time—something moved among the pines, but it was much too far away to see what it was.

"What's over there, Gran? Looks like nothing but wilderness to me."

"Not quite. I've heard there's a fairly new summer house development in that direction — vacation places, you know—but I've never been there myself. It doesn't show from here, but the river makes an angle around there somewhere."

"Maybe we ought to take the Volkswagen over there, it might turn out to be a nice little drive. I guess we can get in from the highway behind the bridge."

But they decided to take a closer look around the lodge property first. Their friend, Young Shirley, wasn't known to be especially adventurous, and if she was still around, she'd most likely be nearby.

Grandma and Pixy walked across the parking lot, then trod carefully along a very narrow path down towards the creek. Another couple of hundred yards farther on would be the river, but Grandma had no desire to go there. The ground was soft and wet, and she didn't want to mess up her shoes. Secretly she reproved herself for not having brought her sneakers on this trip. Damn these fancy high heels!

"Young Shirley would never take off without telling me," she said now. "She's like a younger sister to me, Pixy. Confides all her little secrets in me."

Oh sure, thought Pixy. *Everybody* told their secrets to Gran. She had ways of making people tell her their innermost thoughts.

"She also wouldn't leave her new pigskin suitcase and the matching overnight bag behind," Gran went on. "How come the rescue people gave up looking for Shirley so soon?"

"Because they only searched for her along the creek and as far as the river, and only a little way up that funny mountain over there because of the cliffs.

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You remember from last year? There's no way anybody but a skilled mountain climber can get out of this gully except by highway, Gran. And Shirley surely wasn't a mountain climber. So one can't really blame the guys for not looking longer."

Grandma sat down on a large boulder, taking off her shoes for a minute. "What about the river, then?"

"Not deep around the part where this creek runs into it. I had a nice little talk with one of the rescue people—in fact, she was a rather pretty *girl*."

Grandma just sniffed.

It had started to get a little chilly. Mist rose over the shallow water of the creek. Pixy shivered.

"It's getting spooky around here. We ought to go back," he said.

They walked back up to the lodge and had their dinner. It was like party time in the large dining room, with six conventioneers sitting at each small round table. There was lively chatter and laughter, but Grandma and Pixy just could not get into the spirit of things. They were the first ones to leave. They decided to take their car for a spin over to the summer house development; otherwise they knew they'd spend another sleepness night.

There was a lot of traffic on the highway, and with the glare of oncoming headlights, Pixy almost missed the turn-off to the side road. It was quite dark among the mountains by then, and the mile and a half along the bumpy, dusty gravel track made the drive seem much longer. At the end of the road was a wide gateway with "Pineland" written on the overhead sign. They drove through it, peering into the dark. It took them a while to spot the small houses, for they were almost hidden behind tall trees. Most of them seemed to be dark and empty, probably waiting to come alive on weekends when their owners drove up from the city to their little hideaways.

"Sure doesn't seem a lively place, does it?" said Pixy. "Why anybody would come here and spend their weekends among those trees is beyond me. I mean, what is there to *do* here?"

Grandma just shrugged her shoulders. "To each his own, although frankly, I'd prefer a more open, cheerful weekend place myself. Maybe it's livelier during skiing season."

They drove slowly along the road, that section of which was paved. At the end of it they saw a house on a piece of property twice the size of the others. It was enclosed with a high chain link fence, and the pines around it seemed much more crowded than elsewhere.

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"I wonder if this is the area we were able to see from over there by the lodge, Pixy? You remember, the moving thing we saw from the fateful bench."

"It seems to be in that general direction, doesn't it? How far do you suppose it is—as the crow flies—from the lodge to here? Two miles? With the bend in the highway and all, I don't think it's any farther. I wonder, Gran, if the police asked around here for Shirley, or for Arthur White last year."

"Oh, I think not. With the river and the creek in between, this area has absolutely nothing to do with the lodge. One can only reach it via the highway and the little private road. I can't see either Shirley or Arthur White coming here. Why should they want to? Unless, of course, they saw something strange over here. But then again, why take off without telling anybody?"

Pixy parked the car across the road from the fenced-in property, and he and his partner got out and walked up to the gate. It wasn't quite closed, so they pushed it all the way open and walked right through. It was very dark now, with only a few stars and a very narrow crescent moon visible among high mountain peaks.

A small white bungalow sat a few yards back from the road, the only place where the ground was level. Behind the house the property seemed to slope off towards the river. The detectives could faintly see the far-off lights of Gully Lodge, behind which the mountains rose to a jagged skyline. The snowtopped peaks were still shrouded in a soft pink mist, as on flatter grounds the sun had not yet set.

"How absolutely beautiful," sighed Grandma.

"How creepy!" muttered Pixy. "We should have come here in the morning. Can't see anything in the dark anyway." Pixy was definitely a bright-light city person.

Grandma was just going to make a snide remark when they both heard crackling in the trees beside them. They spun around, bumping into each other, but they saw only the uneven outline of the tops of the pines against the almost navy sky.

Grandma whispered, "It sounded as though someone or something—maybe an animal —trod on a twig."

"SOMETHING!" Pixy's skin crawled.

"Pixy, you're not . . . ?" she hissed back. Her superstitious partner had better not talk of supernatural things—ghosts — here. One never quite knew where one stood with that little man. At times he saw ghosts everywhere, on other occasions he could be quite the hero.

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The detectives stood in silence, not moving a muscle. They had the uneasy feeling that they were being watched, that someone was keeping the bungalow under a sinister surveillance. Then again, their uneasiness could perhaps be attributed to the dark, the silence, and the unfamiliar. Pixy and Grandma tiptoed a little closer to the house and stopped again, listening. Something flickered. A mere wisp of light shone through one of the front windows and then was gone. The detectives drew in their breaths sharply and waited. Then the light appeared again. This time it showed through the little square window on the upper half of the front door. Pixy's heart beat furiously, and even Grandma got the creeps and stayed very close to her partner.

After a few minutes they heard the front door open stealthily, a faint little creak really, and the dark form of a figure came down the front steps. Grandma and Pixy quickly flattened themselves against a large bushy pine. Briefly they saw the silhouette as he—or she—walked out onto the road, leaving the gate open as the detectives had done. Utter silence surrounded the little bungalow after that. The only sounds that reached their ears were the distant humming of the traffic along the highway and the steady, peaceful gurgling of the river below. There was no wind in the trees, and the air was cold and damp. The upward-creeping mist had obscured the lights from the far-off lodge. The pinkness of the mountain skyline had disappeared, and only ominous dark shadows against a slightly lighter sky remained. Pixy shuddered, and Grandma was extremely uneasy as well. They still didn't know what—if anything—lurked beside them in the trees.

"Let's drive home and come back tomorrow morning," whispered Pixy.

"And lie awake in bed all night, wondering about this mysterious place? Forget it. How about trying the door? I don't think it's locked."

"Gran, we can't go inside a strange house! And have you forgotten, this is somebody's summer house—somebody unknown to us. It has nothing to do with Shirley's disappearance."

"Maybe it has. This is definitely the only inhabited property visible from the lodge entrance. The rest of the view consists of steep cliffs, a stretch of creek, and a not very deep river. So—" Grandma forgot to whisper, and her voice seemed to echo from the trees, "—the only feasible place that could

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attract some kind of interest would be either the highway or this hill with the summer houses. I vote for the latter, Pixy."

Pixy shrugged and together the two detectives walked up to the front door. Pixy tried the doorknob, and he wasn't very surprised when the door opened easily. Grandma called, "Hello. Is anybody home!"

There was no reply, but they both heard a sound from the room to the right, as if someone had scraped a chair back. Grandma found the light switch beside the entrance, and the place lit up. It instantly became a very ordinary hallway, with jackets hanging on a wooden stand and a pair of boots, men's boots, in front of it. Grandma found another switch just around the corner in the front room. When she flipped it on, they saw a very frightened, wide-eyed Shirley standing in the middle of the floor.

"Shirl!" cried Grandma. "What the hell are you doing here? Good grief, gal, you sure know how to create a mystery. What *are* you doing here?"

Young Shirley just stood there, glaring at the intruders.

"Well?" asked Pixy, "Why are you here? Over at the lodge there was quite a to-do about your disappearance. Some people even thought you might have drowned in the river."

"And who was the person we saw sneaking out of here? In fact, Shirl, there seems to be a third person out among the pines," said Grandma.

"A *third* person?" Young Shirley sat down on the sofa. "A third person?" she asked again. "There can't be."

"Something is out there," said Pixy. *"Something—"* He didn't finish the sentence, for Grandma gave him a warning look.

"There are raccoons out there," said Shirley weakly.

"What sneaked out of this house wasn't a raccoon, Shirl." Grandma was puzzled. What *was* the matter with her friend? Could it be that the poor thing had gone funny in the head? She sure hoped not. Shirley was still quite young. Grandma looked around the room and chose a somewhat faded wing chair, while Pixy sat down on a swivel rocker.

"Well, you might as well tell us why you're acting so peculiar. Why aren't you at the convention, what are you doing here, and who was here with you—and had to sneak out?" Grandma frowned slightly. Then all of a sudden she slapped her knees and cried, "Shirley, you old so-and-so! You've found yourself a boyfriend! Am I right? But why all the secrecy?" Grandma peered over her glasses. "What's wrong with him?" she asked, concerned.

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"Oh, please. Must you be so—so inquisitive?"

"You know me, Shirl. Inquisitive is my middle name."

"Huh!"

Nobody said anything for a while, then Shirley shifted uneasily on the sofa.

"Come on, tell us," prompted Pixy gently.

Young Shirley shook her head, sadly. Then she sat waiting. Grandma and Pixy said nothing. Shirley shifted again on the sofa, and the silence deepened around her. She looked from one detective to the other, and her eyes were hooded. She sighed.

"All right," she said finally. Her voice was almost a whisper. "Okay, I'll tell you what really happened."

The detectives leaned back in their chairs, still silent. Shirley began her tale.

"It all started with Arthur White. As you know, he and I were both stamp collectors. We first met six years ago at the hobby fair. But at that time we never exchanged more than a few words about our stamps. He always brought his widowed sister-in-law, his late brother's wife, along, so he couldn't really talk much, or trade stamps with fellow collectors, because she was a most unfriendly, even rude, person. The truth was, of course, that she was bored during those conventions. Should have let poor Arthur go alone, but she wouldn't hear of it. She felt it was his duty to take care of her because Arthur had been driving the fatal car when her husband was killed back in the sixties. Then, two years ago, the summer house complex was being built, and Mrs. White made Arthur drive them over here to have a look. She fell instantly in love with one of the houses. And . . . "

"Go on, Shirl," Grandma prompted.

"Well, the long and short of it," Young Shirley said, "was that in order to afford such a house, they had to sell the house they owned jointly in town and rent a smaller place instead." She lapsed into silence once again, eyeing the detectives carefully.

"Things didn't go well with Arthur and his sister-in-law after that," she continued at last. "Finally three or four months later they parted. She got this bungalow, and he got—well, nothing really. He became very bitter."

"Can't blame the poor man," said Pixy. "Did you somehow keep in touch with the Whites during the year?"

"Goodness, no!" answered Shirley. "They didn't mix much with people. I don't think they had any friends. Seems the annual hobby fair was their only time out among a lot of people.

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Mrs. White was not friendly, as I've told you already.

"Anyhow, at last year's fair Arthur came alone for the first time. So, he and I both being stamp collectors, naturally we talked a lot, and even made a few good trades. On the second morning right after breakfast, we were sitting in the morning sun on that bench beside the entrance. It faces the hill with the summer house complex, and he kept on staring sadly at it. I did try to cheer him up, but the more I tried, the glummer he became."

Shirley's attempts at cheering people up were well known to her friends, for they were so overacted they could drive anybody either nuts or glum.

"The more he stared at his property, the more the resentment and anger built up inside him. I could almost see him gnash his teeth. Suddenly he jumped up and started to rant and rave. It was fortunate no one else was close by at the time, for he was really quite a scary sight. I did my darndest to calm him down, but it was no use.

"So in the end I agreed to accompany him to Pineland in his car. When we arrived, I stayed in the car while Arthur stormed into the house. And you just wouldn't believe his sister-in-law's nasty shrieking and cursing, and Arthur's yelling and screaming. It was just awful! Then all of a sudden I heard a loud crash, a piercing cry—and all went quiet. I waited for a minute, but when Arthur didn't come out, I couldn't stand it any longer and ran into the house. And, oh—" Shirley put her face into her hands and sobbed loudly. Grandma handed her a Kleenex, and Shirley talked on.

"Mrs. White lay sprawled on the floor, with blood dripping from her head onto the off-white carpet. Arthur was standing over her, his eyes wide and wild, and he cried: 'I only pushed her a little—after she threw a potted plant at me. Oh, my God, did I kill her?' It was just horrible, and he kept on howling, and his sister-in-law's lifeless eyes looked up at the ceiling. I put my arms around Arthur, trying to calm the man." Shirley sniffled. Grandma and Pixy sat transfixed in their chairs, stunned.

Then Shirley said, "And, I must admit, I got the idea that if we buried her quickly right there on the property, no one would know what had happened. We found a perfect spot near the border of the property, and Arthur dug quite a deep grave. Then we put her in it, and I helped him fill it up. It was my idea also to plant two small pines on top. After that Arthur was in no shape to re-

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turn to Gully Lodge, so he stayed behind and I went back there alone. I walked all the way up to the highway and was lucky enough to catch a bus back towards the lodge. And all that took a remarkably short time. Just a couple of hours, four or five maybe, and nobody had even missed me at the convention."

"We all hang out with our own fellow specialty collectors, in my case thimble collectors," said Grandma. "And anyhow, Arthur White wasn't reported missing until his roommate, a fussy coin collector, got worried.

"So Shirl, what else happened?"

"*Nothing* else happened last year. I returned with you, Katie, and Sophie to town. And it might sound strange to you, but I forced Arthur and the nasty business out of my mind. That was possible only because I worked harder than ever at my job at the flower shop. But when we arrived at the hobby fair yesterday—*was* it only yesterday?—it all came back to me, overwhelmingly so. While you people all bent down to recover Katie's buttons, I sat down for a moment on the bench beside the entrance, looking out over the hills beyond the river. And then curiosity got the better of me, and I walked out to the highway and caught a bus down over the bridge to the cutoff to Pineland. I walked along that awful gravel road all the way to the Whites' house. I knocked on the front door, and when nobody answered, I walked around to the back. And there stood Arthur, looking longingly, with stooped shoulders, over towards Gully Lodge where he was missing this year's hobby fair. I felt so sorry for him."

Young Shirley sniffled again, and tears ran down her cheeks.

"Anyhow," she went on, "when Arthur and I looked at each other, there in the back of the house, with the grave with the two small pines so close by, something happened between us—as if a deep bond between us—"

"Well, there sure as hell is a deep bond between the two of you, Shirl. MURDER!" exclaimed Grandma.

"No, no! Not murder. It was an accident that Arthur's sister-in-law fell against—"

"Don't tell us. Tell that to the police," Pixy broke in. And Grandma cried, "Oh Shirley, such a stupid thing to do! Why didn't you come to me for advice? And, how could you live all this time, a whole year, with a thing like that hanging over your head?" She put an arm around her sobbing friend. Then she asked softly, "About the person who sneaked out of this house when we arrived, Shirl."

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"You might as well know," said Shirley dully. "It was Arthur. When we saw the headlights of a car coming towards this place, we panicked. We quickly turned off all lights, and Arthur grabbed his jacket and flashlight and tried to hurry out of the house. I guess he's waited for the police every day for a year. But you were already on the property when he came out, weren't you? I wonder where he went. And you must believe that he is *not* a killer. I shouldn't even wonder if eventually he'd give himself up at the police station."

It took Grandma and Pixy quite a while to talk Shirley into going with them to the sheriff's office, but in the end she was just too tired to protest any longer.

"Do you think Arthur and I have to go to jail?" she asked with a quavering voice.

Grandma shrugged her shoulders. "Who knows, Shirl. But at least you and Arthur White shouldn't have this thing on your consciences any longer. Just get everything out into the open and accept the consequences."

"When—and if—they find Arthur, he'll be ever so angry with me!"

"Oh, I think he will not."

Grandma went inside Gully Lodge, collected her thimbles from the exhibition room, stuffed them into her suitcase among her underwear, and got into the passenger seat of the Volkswagen. Pixy put the car into gear, and they drove slowly out of the parking lot. "How will Katie Globeflower and Sophie Carlton get home?" asked Pixy.

"They're having so much fun at this hobby fair, they want to stay for another day, then go home by bus. Some friends they are!" sniffed Grandma.

"Oh well, at least we aren't so cramped now in this little car. Aren't you going to have one last look at Gully Lodge?" he asked.

"I'll *never* look at that place again. My heart is broken, Pixy. It is a horrible thing to hand a dear friend over to the police for being an accessory to murder." She wiped the tears from the corners of her eyes.

"If we'd kept our mouths shut nobody would ever have known," reflected Pixy. "But of course we have our licenses to consider. By the way, Gran, is anybody paying us for solving the case of the Hobby Fair mysteries?"

Grandma growled, then hit her partner with her purse.

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FICTION

The Angry Courier

by Jeffry Scott

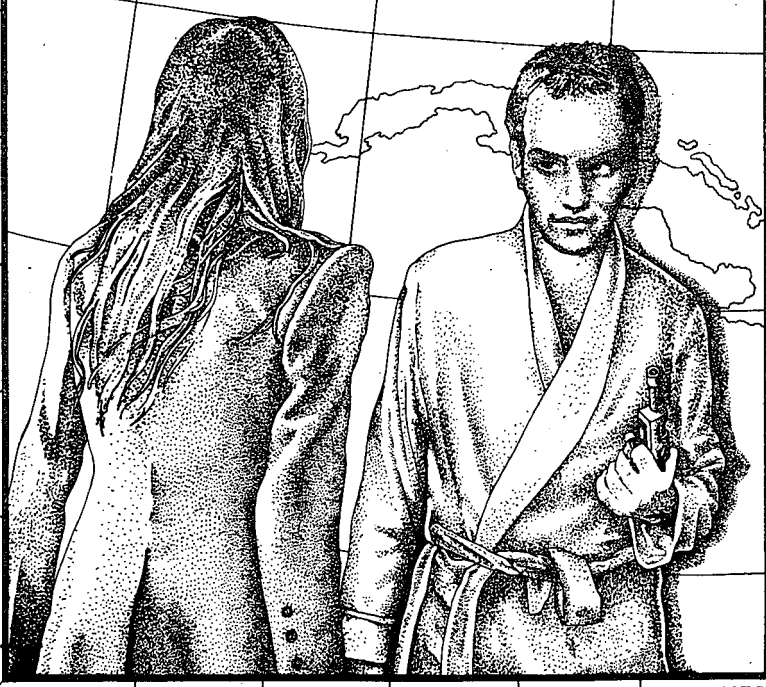


Illustration by Glenn Wolff

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The hair was broken.

Maryse Cunningame thought about that, willing heart and pulse rate to subside. The hair came from her auburn head and was virtually invisible against the rich wood of the apartment door. She had not been in the field for several years, but the routines had continued as an unthinking ritual.

There wasn't a scratch on the lock. Maryse sighed and backed away from the door and went out into the parking area where there was a pay phone. She got a busy signal, but after thirty seconds the tone cut out and she spoke the day's word followed by an extension number.

Tanner recognised her voice and was defensive. "Look, it wasn't my men's fault. Also, it isn't your business."

She sighed again. "Ed, I'm not calling to gloat. Just to confirm a wild hunch."

Edward Tanner didn't listen. "Hell, the man should have been exhausted. Why would he do a fool thing like that?"

"You mean Andrews got away from you."

Tanner's tone was a curse. "Yes! We're still trying to find out how. The plane landed, the rest of the passengers disembarked. Somehow Andrews bypassed Immigration and Customs and our, um, welcoming committee. And no, we haven't a clue where he went."

Maryse smiled wryly. "I know where he went. At least, I think so. I'll be in touch quite soon." She hung up before he could argue or, worse still, issue a direct order.

Her upper lip felt damp and she knew that her palms were sticky. Self-preservation whimpered to walk away from the phone and the little apartment block. She had a swift inward picture of Lin Andrews, with his Indian brave's face and unreadable eyes only a shade or so darker than gin. He'd always given her an impression of anger not so much in check as safely harnessed and turned to use, like an atomic pile. But those could go critical under abuse.

His captors, no doubt, had abused Andrews—physically, psychologically. Maryse Cunningame was certain why he had given them the slip at the airport. Something had gone wrong, and good security meant that Lin Andrews knew of only one person in the world of whom to demand an explanation. Or to use for revenge.

She did walk away from the parking area, but only to skirt the building. Her apartment was at ground level and could be approached from the swimming pool with its margins of manicured grass.

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Slipping off her shoes and carrying them with her purse, Maryse padded along the grass. Her hair lifted in a sudden, chilly breeze from the sea. Her hips rolled slightly, pleasantly. Most males watching would have regretted that she wasn't wearing a bikini.

Maryse Cunningame was wondering if she might die within the next few minutes.

Through the sliding glass doors, she watched Andrews. His hair was damp and spiky, he was wearing her towelling robe. He was holding a self-loading pistol, examining it. He worked the slide, caught the ejected round, pressed the magazine release catch, checked the load, and had the weapon together again in a moment.

He did all that with the abstracted deftness of a man blowing stubble from his electric razor or sharpening a pencil.

Maryse waited for him to look up. Then she slid the doors apart and stepped inside. "Hi, Lin."

"Counsellor." They listened to the air conditioner hum. He smiled wolfishly, so fleetingly that a blink would have obscured it. "Ask me how it all went."

"Drink?"

"No. What you do is close that door and sit over there. Put your purse on the floor."

"As you wish." She sank into the chair. "How did it all go?"

Andrews squatted on his heels, propped on his left fist, the pistol held laxly across one thigh. "They were waiting for me when I landed. Like they expected me. They stripped and body-searched me, they put me in solitary for forty-eight hours, then they beat up on me some.

"Then they started the questions. Generally, they ask, beat, ask again. These people want you to know they aren't kidding." Lin Andrews might have been discussing varying attitudes towards tourists.

"I didn't tell them anything because I couldn't. So . . . let's see . . . they beat up on me again and then they escorted me to the airport and threw me aboard the next flight out. I went barefoot, counsellor, because they'd ripped my shoes apart. I got given a blanket on the plane because my clothes were pretty much in shreds, too.

"One of the stews was taking gear to her fiancé, she loaned me jeans and a sweater." Andrews' expression was placid, or locked-in, but his voice broke. "Otherwise I'd have hit JFK looking like a derelict. That doesn't sit well with me."

"You've every right to be angry," Maryse began.

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His eyes flared, oil-fed flame raving silently behind the glass peephole of a boiler. "Don't patronize me, counsellor! I'm not angry, I'm killing mad."

"Yes," she agreed inadequately.

Andrews looked at the carpet. He traced its pattern, idly, leaving pressure marks from the muzzle of the pistol. "Crazy. I've been round the course.

"By the time I was thirty and out of the service I'd learned that you never trust anybody, not all the way and forever.

"But you I was ready to make an exception. I thought what we had was different."

"You told me not to be patronizing, Lin. Okay, but don't you start past-tensing on me. What we had is what we can still have. It is special."

"Nice try." It was a professional appreciating a professional.

She colored angrily. "And don't cry in your beer, captain. I got you out of a very sticky situation because I'm a very good lawyer. You walked, when even with plea-bargaining, you should . . . Well, you know what you faced.

"You owed me; fees aside. And I collected, by putting you in touch with people who wanted an errand run. For which you're being well paid."

"Not enough," Andrews said softly. "All the money in the world wouldn't do it, my darling. Now we're going to talk turkey."

He'd allowed her to make herself a drink.

"The thing is, I was set up. I half expected to be, from the start. Then I'd tell myself, 'No, man, it's *Maryse* sending you.'" He shook his head wonderingly. "Crazy, huh?"

"Not really. All right, I used you. You're a big boy, Lin. That much money . . . you knew it might be a rough ride."

"There wasn't any ride, lady." The words grated. "I stepped off that plane, two weeks back, and it finished right there."

Andrews was sitting on the floor now, one knee up, the pistol drooping on his shin. "I'm not a spook—"

"True. But you are an unscrupulous man with a flinty determination to live well without working for those rewards." She smiled with genuine warmth.

"I'm not a spook, but I'm not entirely a fool. They were waiting for me, therefore they'd been tipped off.

"So . . . either I was red meat to distract the sharks while your real courier went in and tiptoed out, or . . ." Andrews ran his free hand across his

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chin with an audible rasp.

"Say it, Lin."

"Or else you're a traitor. Either way . . . " Maryse shuddered abruptly, biting her lip in irritation at betraying such fear. Andrews glanced away.

"You may not believe this, girl. But I'll hate to kill you. Back there on the island, in that cell, it was all I wanted to do, better than breathing. Now . . . But I'll have to, it's the way I am. Sure, my pride's been hurt, along with my hide. It's the betrayal that counts, though. I was so sure you were different and could make me different."

He hefted the pistol dreamily. "You first, then maybe me. I just don't know."

Maryse cleared her throat. "That would be a terrible waste, Lin. We both have a lot of good years in us."

"Not me, counsellor. Not after this."

Chin on palm, hair swinging forward, she leaned out of the chair. "You're wrong. You say it's an either-or thing, one of two alternatives.

"Supposing there's a third possibility that hasn't entered your head?"

Andrews blinked tiredly. "That would be nice, Maryse. But there isn't." The round, empty eye of the pistol stirred as his hand came up.

Lin Andrews was weeping. He wasn't good at it. When she tried to put her arms around him, he cried out and rolled free. "I can't even do that! I ought to kill you!"

"Kill, shmill." She snicked the safety catch back into place and skidded the pistol away from them across the carpet. "You can't murder the woman who loves you, that's such a terrible discovery?"

His turn to shudder. His look of disgust and despair, nakedly natural, made Maryse's heart shrivel for an instant.

He hugged himself. "I'll get going in a minute. If you are a traitor, you'd better run. There were people waiting for me at the airport, I spotted them before I ducked out. I'll make sure they find me, I'll tell them what happened.

"If I was just a decoy . . . well, there you go. Either way, you did a great number on me, counsellor."

"I'll make you a drink. Have you eaten recently?" She rose gracefully and went to the kitchen.

Speaking to himself, Andrews muttered, "I want to sleep. I can't, I've tried, but I'd give my right arm just to sleep." He ignored the glass she brought back and placed at his side.

Maryse said: "You'd better listen, Lin. For both our sakes.

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I knew you'd be angry; it never occurred to me you'd take it this way . . . Dad always told me never to mix private and public business."

"Words, lots of words." He was trying to sneer. Clumsily, Andrews smeared the back of a hand across his eyes.

Staring ahead, Maryse said, "Time was against us, or I wouldn't have dragged you into this. You were tough, I thought, and clean. In an intelligence sense. No track record for anything but ordinary crime. You couldn't tell them anything because you hadn't anything to tell. You believed the mission started when somebody made contact with you, and that was all you did know. You wouldn't break, or die of sheer fright, and you had the proved ability to survive.

"The regime there can't afford any more international scandals, so once they came up dry, they'd simply expel you; as they did."

Andrews picked up the drink and put it down again, untasted.

"So I was a decoy."

Maryse Cunningame made an impatient sound. "Consider this, Lin: I'll make it exceedingly simple. We have a valued informant over there. The informant has information we need. But he can't be compromised — we'll need him again.

"If he uses radio, his life can be measured in days. The mail isn't secure, and neither are the phones. Everybody there watches everybody else, and the Soviet and Cuban snoops watch the watchers. If a free-world courier makes contact with him, he's blown. With apologies to John Donne, a man *can* be an island, you see. Our man is an island on an island, if you will. Challenge: reach him, put our courier in contact, collect the information. Which even in miniature photo form, is relatively bulky, covering an area of, oh, several square inches. Which had to be retrieved and brought to the United States this month."

"Okay. But this has nothing to do with me."

Apparently at a tangent, she said, "You're a big man, Lin. Tall, long in the leg. That flight attendant who lent you the jeans . . . lucky her boyfriend was the right size."

Andrews stiffened, sitting up and opening his mouth. Either he didn't notice, or he allowed Maryse to take his hand.

She stared at him. "I love you, Lin. I'm going to prove it. I'm going to lay it out for you, and then Ed Tanner and his crew will debrief you, and they'll find out that I told you, and catch me in a breach of security

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and we'll have something in common, you and I. Because I won't be a spook, either. Not any more."

She hitched closer, and took his other hand. "The flight attendant gave you the clothes and took your old ones, the ones that had been opened at every seam. To throw away, she said."

He nodded slowly. "I changed in the washroom, she went in afterwards and threw all the discarded stuff into a trash bag."

Maryse chuckled sourly. "Which was taken off the plane under escort as soon as you landed.

"You were sent there for one reason, Lin, to get arrested. To be exact, to have your clothing searched. You weren't concealing anything, of course. Not until they *had* searched. Our man was in charge of the searching, you see."

A panel truck had driven as close to the communal swimming pool out back as it could manage. Men in white coveralls were inspecting the pump house. Maryse Cunningame looked at her watch; she'd wondered how long it would take Ed Tanner to think of checking her home. Andrews had made the visit certain by ripping her phone out.

Lin Andrews pulled her against him and kissed her and it lasted a long time. "I love you, girl. That's why I lost my mind for a while, there. Only because I love you so much."

Maryse murmured, "That's all right, then," dryly. Ed Tanner's baseball cap was too large, his coveralls too small. She waved reassuringly and beckoned him to come on in.

She said, "Listen, Lin, if I'm going to hang my shingle out, get off the taxpayers' backs, you'll have to find a job. I know it's agin your principles and so forth, but I'm sacrificing a lot to keep you, so you'd better be ready to do the same."

Ed Tanner and the back-up squad were at the glass doors. Andrews didn't reply. She swore under her breath, and pulled back to look at him.

Lin Andrews was asleep.

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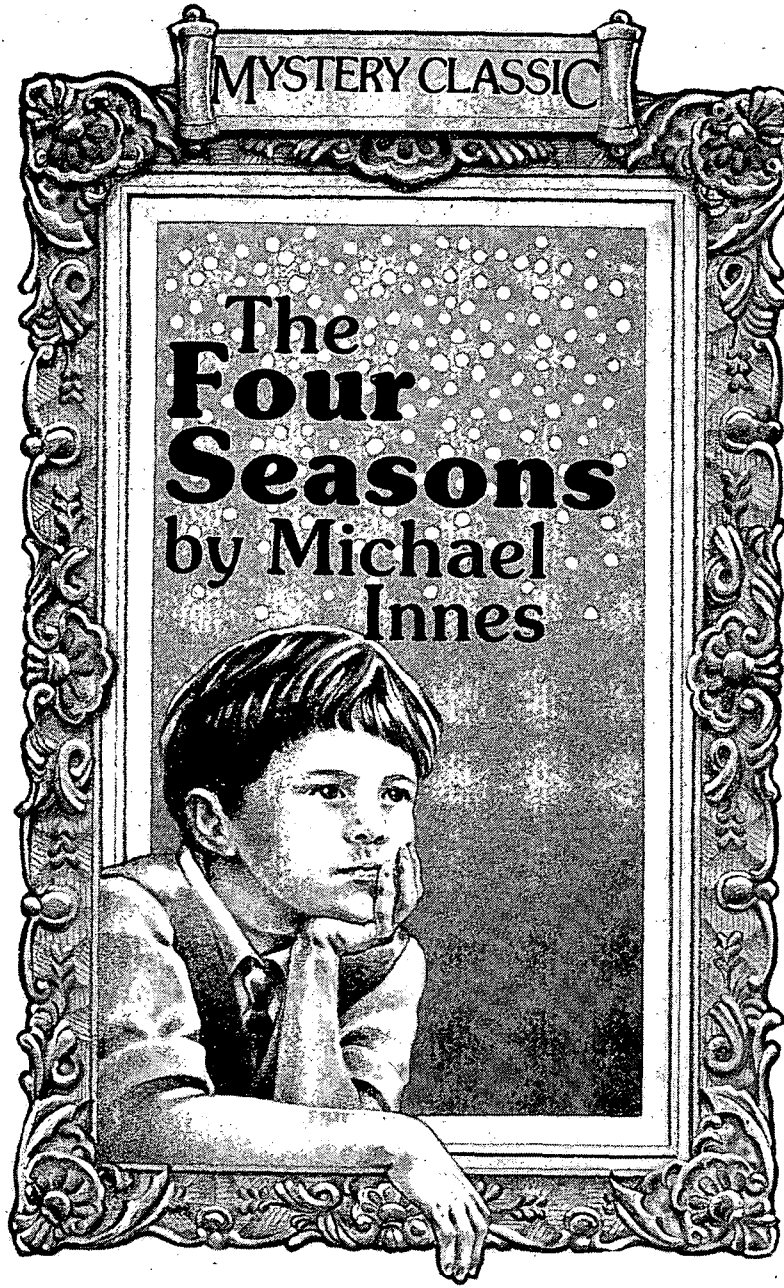


Illustration by Ray Lago

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The archdeacon had told us a ghost story, and as the polite murmurs of interest and appreciation died away our hostess threw a log in the fire. It was quite a small log, but nevertheless the action committed us to a further sleepy, even if very tolerably comfortable, half hour. And this prompted one of the younger people to a question the precise phrasing of which was perhaps a shade lacking in tact. "And now," she asked, "couldn't we have a really exciting one?"

"A mystery story," another girl said. "A murder in a sealed room, and then some frightfully cunning detection, and all ending up in a terribly thrilling chase."

"That is just what Sir John could give us." Our hostess turned to Appleby. "You wouldn't be so unkind as to refuse?"

For a moment the assistant commissioner was silent, so that I wondered whether he was going to contrive some polite excuse. A long career at Scotland Yard had provided him with plenty of horrific material, and there had been occasions on which I had known him come out with it forthrightly enough. But he had old fashioned ideas on what was suitable for mixed company. So I wasn't very surprised by his words when he presently did speak.

"Do you know, I'm afraid that positively nothing in the murderous way comes into my head? But an affair that had its moment of mystery—well, I think I can manage that."

"Only a moment of it?" The girl who had required excitement was reproachful.

Appleby shook his head. "Oh—what I shall tell you was abundantly mysterious. But mystery, you know, is another matter. One is lucky ever to get a glimpse of it." Appleby paused, and it was plain that he spoke seriously. Then he told us his tale.

"John and Elizabeth Fray were old friends of my wife's family, and for some years we used to spend a week with them just before Christmas. The party would be rather like this one, and the house was similar, too—which is no doubt what has put the incident I am going to describe into my mind. Fray Manor rambled in an easy, unassuming fashion over a good deal of ground and back through several centuries. The oldest bit was undoubtedly at the top. You may judge that to be a good mysterious touch at the start, although I hasten to add that it has no particular relevance for my story.

"Well then, there, at the top of the house, was a fine late-Elizabethan Long Gallery, with a magnificent view through high, grey-mullioned windows. Not your sort of view, though. Fray is in the

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Fen Country; and the house looks out over level fields stretching to the horizon, with here and there a canal or windmill or church tower, and everywhere an enormous sky.

"But there was another particular in which the setup at Fray isn't to be compared with this." And here Appleby turned to our hostess with a smile. "Neither John nor Elizabeth had the sort of grasp you and Hugh possess of family history—and particularly of family possessions. I don't mean that they were indifferent to John's inheritance—far from it. But they were vague, and I think felt that through all past and all future time Fray had been and would be the same. In point of fact, there were ominous signs that they were mistaken, and the family fortunes were altogether shakier than they understood.

"I used to doubt whether their small son, Robin, would much mend matters. For Robin too was vague—although in what might be called a potentially more distinguished way. He was a shy child, but with some hidden flame in him—of passion, of imagination: one couldn't tell what. Certainly he was more likely to add something to the ideal than to the practical world. I'm afraid that I can't describe him better than that—which is a pity, since my story turns on him."

"Robin Fray is its hero?" The archdeacon asked this.

And Appleby nodded. "Yes. Not, I'm glad to say, the tragic hero. Although in a sense, it was a near thing.

"I don't need to tell you much about the houseparty. It wasn't large, and we nearly all were friends of long standing. But there were three exceptions. Miss Shibley was an elderly woman who painted dogs, and John Fray's admiration for this accomplishment was so great that he had made Elizabeth invite her to stop, pretty well out of the blue. Then there was a fellow called Habgood, who appeared to do free-lance articles on country houses for the magazines. Finally, and in rather a different category, there was an American cousin, Charles Fray.

"The actual cousinship must have been extremely remote, since the American branch of the family had been established in New England for many generations. But I was amused to notice that Charles knew far more about the family history than John did. Not that Charles obtruded his knowledge. He was an observant, rather diffident bachelor. It was with some surprise that I gathered he was a highly successful business executive and extremely wealthy. He was due to conclude his visit a couple of days after my own arrival. I was sorry about this, because he seemed to me a

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thoroughly nice fellow.

"I've mentioned the Long Gallery. We had tea there on the last afternoon of Charles Fray's stay, and it happened that he and I made a little tour of inspection of the paintings lining one side of the place. There were a great many of them, although if Frays had ever had luck on their continental wanderings, and brought home a Titian or a Rubens, it had long since gone to the sale room. But there is often a mild charm in a collection of mediocre pictures that have accreted over some centuries in that sort of house, and my American acquaintance was clearly delighted with this record of his English relatives' artistic tastes.

"There was one painting in particular that he paused before. For some moments I couldn't see why. It was a small autumnal landscape with figures, executed in the Flemish taste of the late sixteenth century, which would have been pleasing enough if the quality of the painting hadn't been rather notably poor. What was represented was a bleak, level scene, with a windmill in the middle distance and the towers of a tiny town closing the horizon. In the foreground was the gable of a house, with an attic window out of which a small boy was gazing rather disconsolately at the prospect. I had just taken this in when Charles Fray touched my arm and pointed across the gallery. I saw his point. There, through the large Tudor window, was an actual landscape very like the painted one we had been glancing at. It was possible to guess at once what had prompted some bygone Fray to make this particular purchase. But that, at the moment, wasn't all. At the real window our small friend Robin was himself gazing wistfully out over the bare fields. He and the boy in the picture, one could feel, were both longing for a gorgeous fall of snow."

Appleby paused on this. The archdeacon, whose successfully accomplished ghost story gave him the status of a performer who had retired into the wings, judged it proper to offer a word of encouragement. "A pleasing incident," he said. "It makes a picture in itself."

"No doubt. But it was then handled a shade heavily—chiefly by Miss Shibley, the woman who painted dogs. She came up at that moment, and I pointed out the correspondence that had attracted us. She brought it into general notice, and even teased Robin a little. She asked him if he knew the painting was a magic painting, and that it would never, never snow again outside until it had snowed in the painting first. It would have been difficult to tell

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what Robin made of this. I thought Charles Fray looked a little startled, and that at the same time he was watching the child curiously. Then he turned the conversation by asking John whether he knew anything about the origin of the Flemish painting.

"But John, of course, was as vague as usual. He had once been told some story about it, which had entirely gone out of his head. He did remember that when his father died there had been some reason for having it specially looked at by the fellow who came down and valued everything. It hadn't proved to be worth much.

"Habgood, the guest who went round writing up country houses, took a hand at this point. That is to say, he peered at the painting with a good deal of curiosity, and then rather baldly remarked that its owner was certainly right, and that it was artistically worthless. I believe John Fray was slightly nettled; probably he liked the thing just because it had a smack of his own familiar landscape; and the incident was closed by some other guest having the good sense to cause a diversion.

"The next morning Charles Fray took his departure. I remember him looking up at the sky as he prepared to step into his car, and saying—in rather a whimsical tone—something about snow coming soon. It was true that that great sky appeared heavy with it. But certainly not a flake had fallen.

"And now I come to the sudden crisis of the affair. What remained of the party was gathered in the drawing room shortly after lunch when Robin burst in upon us like a small madman. 'It's come!' he shouted. 'It's come, it's come, it's come!' His eyes were blazing, and as he stared at us it happened that for a second I met his gaze directly. You remember my saying that there was a moment not simply of the mysterious, but of mystery, in the business? Well, this was it. The boy had met a mystery. He had met the real thing. And he was exalted.

"But now his mother was pulling him up—gently enough, but decidedly. 'Robin dear, don't be so noisy. And what has come?'

" 'The snow. It's come, I tell you!'

"I think we all turned and looked through the window. The sky was more leaden than ever—but still no snow was falling. And suddenly the boy laughed—quite wildly. 'Sillies!' he shouted. 'Dear old sillies! Not outside. In the picture. Don't you remember? It *has* to be in the picture—*first*.'

"There was an awkward silence. Some of us, I imagine, supposed the child to be delirious, and the more obtuse may have concluded that it was all some sort of impertinent joke. I could see Robin's

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parents exchange an alarmed glance. They were simple souls, remember, and probably regarded their boy as being at best quite dangerously dreamy and fanciful.

"Habgood was the first person to produce what looked like a sensible reaction. 'I suppose,' he said, 'that somebody may have been perpetrating a trick up there? I'll go and see.' And then he turned to Robin. 'There's often a good deal of magic in pictures, you know. But it doesn't always last.' He gave the boy a kindly pat on the shoulder, and left the room.

"For some seconds we were all silent. And then somebody gave a little involuntary exclamation, and pointed to the window. The first flakes were coming down."

Our hostess gave a deft kick at her small log, and flame flickered up around it. "I hope," she said, "there *was* magic in the picture."

Appleby nodded. "I was hoping so, too. And I was in possession, you know, of an important piece of evidence."

"Evidence?"

"Just that single glance of the boy's. To a policeman, a wink—or call it the absolute absence of one—ought to be as good as a nod, any day. Somehow it suddenly struck us that we'd all better follow Habgood up to the Long Gallery. I said so, pretty vigorously—and then led the way, with Robin's hand in mine.

"As we mounted the final flight of stairs, Habgood came down to meet us. He glanced at the boy, and for a moment he just didn't appear to know what to say. It was uncomfortable, as you may guess. And then he found what wasn't a bad tone—light, but not in the least condescending or facetious. 'It's gone. Robin. It's gone, as it came. It's true, isn't it, that all snow doesn't lie?'

"The boy said nothing, but I felt his hand tremble, and I saw that he had gone very pale. Suddenly he gave a tug; I let him go; and he ran to the far end of the gallery where the picture hung. By the time he got to the end of that long vista he looked quite comically—or tragically—small.

"When we came up with him he was very still, gazing at the familiar, the mediocre, the untransformed autumnal painting —hanging as it had always hung on the known, predictable wall. He seemed to have no disposition to cry, and for a moment nobody had anything to say. Then some worthy woman began talking nervously to Elizabeth Fray about tricks of light, and what a charming fancy of Robin's it had been. Outside, the snow was still falling.

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"I looked at the little painting, and suddenly I was quite sure that there should indeed be snow there, too. This wasn't entirely intuition. I had, in fact, been doing my best to think. And now I asked John Fray to close the doors at either end of the gallery, and to let nobody out. Then I searched the place—pretty grimly, for I had a notion that, so far as the boy's confidence in this universe was concerned, rather a lot depended on it. Of course there hadn't been time to find a really cunning hiding place. Within half an hour, Robin had his snow scene in his hands."

The girl who had wanted a sealed room and a thrilling chase cried out delightedly at this. "Really and truly?"

Appleby smiled at her. "Really and truly. There it was: the same landscape, the same attic window, the same small boy. But everywhere, snow. And such snow! Teniers couldn't have done it. Nor could he have done the figures with which the small landscape was peopled. Against that snow their life was miraculous. What Robin Fray held was, in its minor way, a masterpiece. Which is what, from the elder Breughel, you might expect."

Appleby had paused. "Explanations? Well, not many are needed. What had prompted Miss Shibley to her joke about the picture being transformed into a snow scene? The subconscious memory of a bit of art history gathered in her student days. What had sent Habgood, the only man with any sort of connoisseurship, to the Long Gallery, before anybody else could check up on Robin's apparently fantastic story? Fuller knowledge of the same bit of history. That was as much as I could obscurely guess while the episode was taking place. Now I can add what I discovered later.

"Breughel is believed to have painted four companion pictures: an identical scene, but at the four seasons of the year. *Spring* and *Summer* survive—the first in Hungary and the second in a public collection in New York. Long ago, a Fray came into possession of *Autumn*. But his grandson—it was long before a Pieter Breughel was accounted very valuable—gave it away to a friend who fancied it, but first caused a mediocre copy to be made by an itinerant painter from the Low Countries. No doubt he wanted some record of a landscape that a little recalled his own estate. Later still, the original *Autumn* perished in a fire. The copy that remained at Fray had, of course, no more than historical interest or value; nobody would give more than a few hundred pounds for it at the most.

"The fourth painting, *Winter,* had long been thought to have perished. But Charles Fray, who was a collector, had run it to earth

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somewhere. Knowing that the English Frays had once owned the original *Autumn,* he brought *Winter* with him on his visit, intending it as a parting gift—a princely gift—to his kinsman and to the home of his ancestors. Miss Shibley's joke prompted him to substitute it for the old copy of *Autumn* just before leaving. The old copy of *Autumn* itself he simply left leaning against the wall. The situation, he supposed, would thus at once explain itself, and at the same time give Robin, to whom he had taken a great fancy, a little amusement.

"So you see what happened. As soon as Robin tumbled in on us with his story, Habgood realized that *Winter* had turned up—and that if he could make off with it when only Robin had seen it, the boy would simply be disbelieved. Things might, of course, go wrong if Charles Fray made inquiries. But if Charles got no acknowledgement of his gift from his English kinsman he would almost certainly remain silent; and if *Winter* was subsequently heard of on the market he would presume that John Fray was behind the sale. Habgood was astute."

Our hostess considered. "But not at all nice. What happened to *Winter?*"

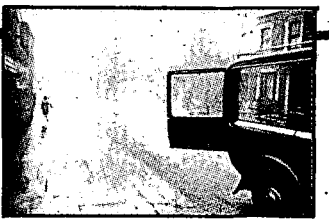
"It hangs in Robin Fray's bedroom now. And I don't think he'll ever have to sell it. The benevolent transatlantic cousin has been around again, and Robin looks like being his heir."

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THE STORY THAT WON



The April Mysterious Photograph contest (photo above) was won by Victoria L. Oexman of Port Hueneme, California. Honorable mentions go to Darwin T. Turner of Iowa City, Iowa; K. J. Franks of Wooster, Ohio; Aillene Lewis of Fort Worth, Texas; Julie Lynn Houseworth of Plainville, Massachusetts; Ernest J. Hahn of South Bethlehem, New York; William Geer of West Valley City, Utah; and Robert Newman of Ithaca, New York.

PEEK-A-BOO by Victoria L. Oexman

I remember now, growing up with the fog. I remember the prickly excitement I would feel as a small child when I stepped out on the porch in the morning and was suddenly enveloped by the fog with all its mysteries. I knew full well that the old school was at the end of the lane but expected castles and giants all the same. And when I grew older, having heard my share of ghost stories upon my grandpa's knee, I remember the creeping terror I felt as the fog swirled mockingly around me. I knew then, too, that my house was just around the bend, but I shivered nonetheless, expecting headless horsemen or flashing scalpels with every step.

We are old now, and tired, the fog and I. It presses against my window as I lie in my bed, and I know the time for frights and fantasies is over. No more illusions or mysteries await me in the fog, only the grim reality that death was there all along and hides no more.

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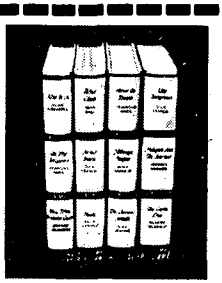
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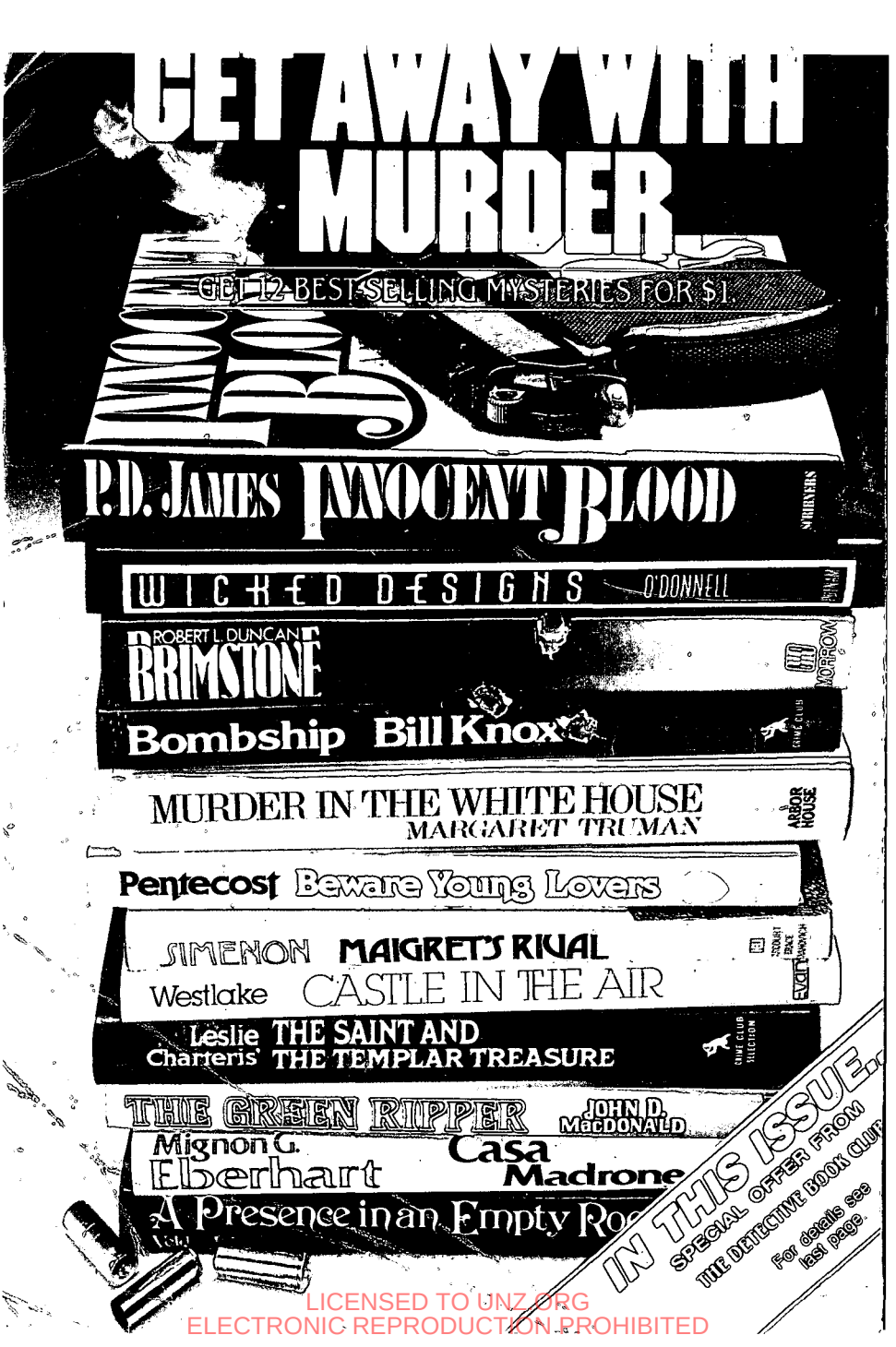
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